



SOFIA VESCOVELLI

A Hundred Years of Polish Philosophy and Culture

CENTO ANNI DI FILOSOFIA E CULTURA POLACCA, ed. by Anna Czajka, Gerardo Cunico and Elisabetta Colagrossi, (Milano–Udine: Mimesis, 2020), pp. 348.

The volume *Cento anni di filosofia e cultura polacca*, edited by Anna Czajka, Gerardo Cunico and Elisabetta Colagrossi, is an interesting and articulate example of intercultural dialogue. It is a collection of several contributions which explore the relationships between Italian and Polish culture, addressing different topics, albeit united by a common dialogic intent.

The work is characterised by a plural and, above all, concrete approach: to the elaboration of abstract theoretical models, often detached from concrete experiences of the encounter/clash of cultures, it prefers a hermeneutic-critical perspective, originating from the „fatigue of dialogue”, whose aim is to put different cultures in communication through pertinent reflections and comparisons.

The dual nature of this bicephalous book, which moves between the Polish and Italian outlooks, aims to show that intercultural dialogue develops through an encounter: it starts with an author, a text, a theme, a translation, and then ventures into the impervious path of mutual understanding, made up of clashes, difficulties, but also of openings to new horizons and of acceptance of diversity.

In fact, the basic intention of the volume goes beyond the academic sphere to turn towards contemporary issues: in a society dominated by violence and fear of diversity, by forgotten solidarity among human beings, by lack of communication, it is necessary to introduce an intercultural approach in the humanities to promote a dialogue.

The volume is the latest and most recent result of a long-standing collaboration between the University of Genoa and the Stefan Wyszyński University of Warsaw. This collaboration has as its centre the project ‘Library

of Polish culture' for Italy, involving Polish and Italian translators and scholars, and coordinated by Anna Czajka with the support of Gerardo Cunico. The project was created to give space and voice to the Polish humanities and their primary figures and thinkers. It includes, among its publications, translations of works by the most renowned authors of Polish culture such as Antonina Kłoskowska, Jan Białostocki, Stanisław Brzozowski, Władysław Stróżewski and Maria Ossowska, accompanied by prefaces written by Polish and Italian scholars¹.

However, the project is much more far-reaching: starting from the translation and dissemination of important texts of Polish culture, interpreted by Polish and Italian scholars, its purpose is to open an intercultural dialogue, a common reflection on topics of universal interest, which can stimulate an interdisciplinary discussion and foster new philosophical and cultural developments.

The volume *Cento anni di filosofia e cultura polacca* is in continuity with this project as it represents, at least in its central part, a critical reflection on the aforementioned authors and their works, providing the reader with a series of essays concerning various themes such as history of art, aesthetics, intercultural philosophy, religious experience and the relationship between moral norms and virtues. Consistently with its broad scope, the volume also includes texts by scholars who have studied the relationships between Italy and Poland in the philosophical, literary and cultural fields, as well as essays by young scholars interested in the project 'Library of Polish culture'.

One of the most important personalities of Polish culture is Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911), a thinker, writer and poet with a restless soul, whose interests ranged from Marxism and Bergson to Polish romanticism and Sorel. However, one of the main themes of his reflection was religious experience.

The essay by Gerardo Cunico 'Brzozowski e Boine: una convergenza inattesa' is dedicated to this author and to the influence which reading of an article by Boine, written for the journal 'La voce' and entitled 'La ferita non chiusa', had on him. Cunico offers a series of critical reflections showing the differences between the two thinkers, but also the possible points of convergence, with particular attention to religious experience.

¹ A. Kłoskowska, *Alle radici delle culture nazionali*, ed. by A. Czajka, Reggio Emilia 2007; J. Białostocki, *Il cavaliere polacco e altri studi di storia dell'arte e di iconologia*, ed. by A. Czajka, Milano–Udine 2015; S. Brzozowski, *Cultura e vita*, ed. by A. Czajka / G. Cunico, Milano–Udine 2016; W. Stróżewski, *Intorno al bello*, ed. by A. Czajka / G. Cunico, Milano–Udine 2017; M. Ossowska, *Norme morali. Tentativo di sistematizzazione*, ed. by A. Pirni, Milano–Udine 2017.

There are two striking elements in this essay. Firstly, the careful and precise reconstruction of the intellectual and existential path of the two authors. Secondly, the critical analysis which highlights, among other aspects, the role of religious experience for both thinkers. Despite some differences, they both conceived and lived religion in terms of a “*religio duplex*” in which there are two parallel and coexisting aspects which the human being tries to reconcile: the inner religion, springing from religious conscience, and the confessional religions, institutionalized, anchored in their own dogmas and traditions. In Brzozowski and Boine the deep experience of the totally Other, of the Absolute, is so radical that it cannot be caged by the Human, by its categorising logic, leaving open the wound Boine wrote about. According to them, religiousness is never an easy compromise with the divine or blind abandonment to the Mystery; it is rather an eternal search for a meaning which cannot be found, but is nevertheless invoked.

The figure of Brzozowski is also explored in Eliza Kącka’s essay ‘Notes on Stanisław Brzozowski’s Reception by the Emigration’, which focuses on the role of the writer Gustaw Herling-Grudziński as a cultural ambassador between Poland and Italy. Herling had the merit of disseminating Brzozowski’s works in the Italian context, in particular the book *The Philosophy of Polish Romanticism*². It became the political and intellectual reference point for Polish soldiers who fought for the liberation of Italy and Europe. The text is interesting not only with regard to the reception of Brzozowski by the Polish exiles, but also because it casts light on practical difficulties connected with the cultural activity in question, as well as the obstacles encountered by Herling’s own writings, showing that the intercultural dialogue is a difficult job of translating experiences and values.

Maria Ossowska (1896–1974), moral philosopher, psychologist and sociologist is another important figure in Polish culture. Influenced by the Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy and Malinowski’s cultural anthropology, she reflected on the issue of moral norms in contemporary society. Three essays, written respectively by Alberto Pirni, Angelo Campodonico and Julia Krauze are devoted to her work, in particular to the book *Norme morali*.

Pirni writes an introductory essay, entitled ‘L’universo dell’agire e le sue determinanti sociali’, in which he outlines Ossowska’s intellectual profile and the main features of her philosophy. In particular, Pirni investigates Ossowska’s reflection on human dignity, to which the author pays great attention, especially with regard to the relationship between the individual self and its social interactions. Pirni’s contribution provides the reader with

² S. Brzozowski, *Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego*, Lwów 1924.

an interpretative key of the work *Norme morali*, i.e. the concept of virtue and the Hobbesian distinction between civic and personal virtues, as well as the link between virtue and norm.

In his essay 'Note a margine di *Norme morali* di Maria Ossowska' Campodonico comments on some statements made by Pirni, in particular regarding the relationship between civic virtues and personal virtues, and the relationship between norm and virtue, offering a second critical point of view on the topic.

Krauze's essay 'La figura del "cavaliere" secondo Maria Ossowska e Jan Białostocki' connects the moral sphere with the artistic one, making a comparison between the views of Maria Ossowska and of the art historian Jan Białostocki on the literary topos of the knight, a figure which they both investigated, from different perspectives. The author explains in detail that Ossowska interpreted ethically the figure of the knight, considered as a model of behaviour. In contrast, Białostocki elaborates an artistic-cultural interpretation, which is evident in his analysis of Rembrandt's painting 'The Polish Rider'.

Lauro Magnani's essay 'Leggere Białostocki in Italia' is devoted to Jan Białostocki (1921–1988), one of the greatest Polish art historians. Magnani, after outlining the evolution of the historical-artistic research centre in Genoa, and the main development trends of art history studies in Italy, reflects on the theme of the image, with particular reference to Białostocki's theses and iconological methodology.

Władysław Stróżewski (1933) is an important Polish philosopher who deals with aesthetics and the ontology of beauty. Three essays are dedicated to his views. The first, written by Angela Ales Bello, entitled 'L'opera d'arte fra l'umano e il divino', reflects on the relationship between beauty and truth, and on the role of art interpreted as an opening to Transcendence. Furthermore, the author underlines the influence which medieval thought, in particular that of Aquinas, had on Stróżewski's philosophy.

Oscar Meo in his text 'L'ontologia del bello in Władysław Stróżewski' focuses on the aesthetics of the Polish philosopher from an ontological point of view, and on the influence which Roman Ingarden's phenomenology had on him. Meo also makes an interesting comparison between the ontological conception of Stróżewski and some contemporary art theories, in order to open a dialogue between them.

In 'Lo spazio dell'arte della parola nella riflessione estetica di Władysław Stróżewski' Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska illustrates the aesthetics of poetic word in Stróżewski (and Ingarden), particularly referring to the poems of Cyprian Norwid, Rainer Maria Rilke and Bolesław Leśmian.

Two studies, respectively by Michele Marsonet and Francesco Coniglione, are devoted to Polish analytical philosophy and to epistemology. The first essay, entitled ‘I rapporti tra filosofia analitica polacca e italiana’, is a review of Italian translations of Polish books and of works by Italian authors on Polish philosophy, which shows the growing but still fragmentary interest in Polish thought in Italy. The second text, entitled ‘Conoscenza tacita: Ludwik Fleck nostro contemporaneo’ outlines the intellectual profile of the epistemologist Ludwik Fleck and his philosophical contribution, focusing on the intercultural dimension of the relationship between sciences, as well as on their historical and cultural context.

The volume also deals with literature, thanks to Piotr Salwa’s contribution. In his essay ‘L’Italia letteraria in Polonia – luci e ombre’, he investigates the reception of Italian literature in Poland from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, showing the cultural bond which connected the two countries for centuries. The author also underlines the partial and often reductive interpretation which characterised Polish reception of the great Italian masters (for example Dante and Petrarca).

The border issue could not be missing in a work dedicated to intercultural dialogue. Anna Czajka, in her essay ‘Borderland as an interdisciplinary question and as a pattern of thinking in Polish cultural studies’ addresses the problem of crossing border territories from a philosophical and cultural points of view. The author, after illustrating the evolution of Polish borders in history, explains how the particular historical and cultural context of Poland influenced the Polish humanities, making them sensitive to the theme of national identity and border territories. Czajka refers to the thought of Antonina Kłosowska and her work *National Cultures at the Grassroot Level*³, so as to underline that the notion of “border” is an interdisciplinary question; in this perspective, the interdisciplinary concept of „border” takes on a deeper meaning: it means dialogical encounter with other cultures aimed at overcoming conflicts and antagonisms, and should be employed as a pattern of thinking in cultural studies. In fact, the dialogue is the nourishing element in intercultural relationships.

The subject of Beata Gaj’s essay ‘Humanistic Latin school and new Latin literature in Silesia (borderland of Poland, Czech Republic and Germany) as the basis for «education towards culture» is Silesia, the territory where Polish, German and Czech cultures meet. In this border area there are numerous cultural influences, among which the Roman element and the Latin School stand out.

³ A. Kłosowska, *National Cultures at the Grass-Root-Level*, trans. by Ch.A. Kisiel, Budapest 2001.


The experience of the Holocaust is addressed from a dual – German and Polish artistic perspective, through a careful analysis of the art of Anselm Kiefer and Mirosław Bałka, in the contribution by Laura Quercioli Mincer ‘Anselm Kiefer e Mirosław Bałka ad HangarBicocca: memoria tedesca e memoria polacca?’

Elisabetta Colagrossi writes two contributions. The first one, ‘Anti-Babel. Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof between Esperanto and religious universalism’, explores the historical-cultural genesis of the Esperanto language in Jewish-Polish culture as a communication tool aiming to break down the walls of isolation and intolerance. The second essay is dedicated to the reflections of Ija Lazari-Pawłowska who, influenced by Gandhi’s non-violence ethics, represents a point of reference for intercultural dialogue.

In his essay ‘Culture, identity, otherness in contemporary Poland’ Attilio Bruzzone outlines the project of critical analysis of contemporary Polish philosophy, focusing on four thinkers: Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko, Andrzej Walicki and Zygmunt Bauman. The author summarily reconstructs the role of contemporary Polish culture in the definition of national identity, also in relation to the historical, economic and philosophical developments of Marxism, phenomenology and cultural studies in Poland.

In conclusion, the publication of the volume *Cento anni di filosofia e cultura polacca* is worth of interest for two main reasons. First of all, due to its theoretical value, since the ideas and reflections of scholars such as Kłoskowska, Białostocki, Brzozowski, Stróżewski and Ossowska deserve to be known and disseminated for their theoretical and historical significance. Furthermore, the plurality of interpretations with which these authors are critically analysed is particularly stimulating for the reader.

Secondly, as has been mentioned at the beginning, this volume represents a particularly successful intercultural operation, thanks to the concreteness of its approach to interculturality and to the overall organicity of the work. In fact, a collection of interdisciplinary and intercultural essays runs the risk of appearing disconnected and devoid of continuity. Although the perspectives of these contributions are inevitably limited to specific themes and authors – a sign of partiality and fragmentation in the reception of Polish philosophy and culture in Italy – the reader is accompanied on a journey between two linked worlds, in which each stage is a moment of deepening, but without ever losing sight of the final goal, namely the intercultural dialogue and mutual contributions between Polish and Italian culture. The hermeneutic work of translation and intercultural encounter is still in progress and the volume does not claim to be exhaus-

tive; it rather represents an important step towards improving the dialogue between cultures, to which, hopefully, other works, perspectives and projects will further contribute. 

SOFIA VERSCOVELLI – doktor filozofii, profesor filozofii i historii w Liceum im. Martina Luthera Kinga (Genoa). Stopień doktora uzyskała na Uniwersytecie w Genui na podstawie dysertacji „Problem zła w teodycei i teodycei procesu Johna Hicka” (promotor: prof. Gerardo Cunico). Studiowała także na Uniwersytecie w Birmingham pod kierunkiem profesorów Yujina Nagasawy i Davida Cheethama, gdzie pogłębiała studia nad filozofią Johna Hicka, a także filozofią procesu ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem myśli Alfreda Northa Whiteheada, Davida Raya Griffina and Charleasa Hartshorne’a. Laureatka w 2017 r. konkursu o Nagrodę Premio Nazionale di Filosofia della Religione „Italo Mancini” za najlepszą pracę doktorską powstałą po 2014 r. W 2015 r. wygrała Konkurs na projekty w zakresie filozofii religii ogłoszony przez Fundację Centrum Badań Campostrini. Najważniejsze publikacje: monografia *Il problema del male nella filosofia di John Hick: un’analisi critica.*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2019; artykuły i rozdziały w monografiach zbiorowych: *Process theodicy and the life after death: a possibility or a necessity?*, *Nuovo Giornale di Filosofia della Religione*, n. 15 gennaio–aprile 2021;– “Theory of natural evolution and conflict between science and religion. The proposal of process philosophy”, *Dialeghestai*, n. 21, dicembre 2019; “Solidarietà tra le Tradizioni Religiose” w *Solidarietà: una Prospettiva Etica*, ed. Gerardo Cunico & Attilio Bruzzone, Mimesis, Milano 2017; “Solidarity Among Religious Traditions”, w *Orientierungskrise. Herausforderungen des Individuums in der heutigen Gesellschaft*, ed. Michael Eckert and Gerardo Cunico, Roderer, Germany 2014.

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