The early reception of Robert Louis Stevenson in Poland

Ilona Dobosiewicz

The aim of the article is to discuss the critical reception of Robert Louis Stevenson in Poland between 1888 when the first Polish translation of Stevenson’s work was published and 1939 (the outbreak of World War II). The reception of any author in a foreign culture is always influenced by a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. It is not only the quality of the work itself and the quality of translations that shape its reception, but also such external circumstances as the political and social situation or publishing practices in a foreign country. Specific cultural and political contexts have a bearing not only on our critical evaluations of writers and works but also on the choices made by translators and publishers, which determine a text’s availability, as well as the choices made by individual readers or literature scholars. To understand the early reception of Robert Louis Stevenson in Poland, one has to be aware of the fact that the country’s complicated history had a significant impact on the reception of foreign literature, especially in the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century. In fact, during Robert Louis Stevenson’s lifetime, Poland as a sovereign state did not formally exist; the country lost its independence when it was partitioned in three stages in 1772, 1793 and 1795 between its neighbours Russia, Austria and Prussia. The three European imperial powers of the day divided Polish territory among themselves in a series of territorial annexations, and Poland was erased from the map of Europe. For the Poles, the final partition began a period of continuous foreign rule that would endure for over a century. Poland regained its statehood only after World War I under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Under the partitions, the policies of the Prussian and Russian
governments in particular were aimed at eradicating the sense of national identity, yet despite such policies and practices the Poles living under the three partitions managed to maintain the feeling of national unity, but in order to do so, they needed to find a way of conceiving a nation without a state. In an attempt to cope with the loss of statehood after the third partition and to counteract denationalization campaigns, they relocated the concept of a Polish nation onto a spiritual plane: Poland became an entity that exists as an idea or a feeling – it did not depend on the material form of the state. Such a concept of Poland is reflected in the song written by Józef Wybicki two years after the third partition of Poland, which was adopted as the national anthem when Poland regained independence in 1918. The first line of the song: ‘Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła, póki my żyjemy’ (‘Poland has not perished yet, as long as we live’) clearly conveys the idea that the lack of political sovereignty does not preclude the existence of a nation. National identity can be sustained even without an independent state. Therefore Poland – effectively erased from the map of Europe – cannot be reduced by changing the map. It becomes imagined as a broadly based cultural community encompassing all those who speak Polish and read Polish literature, regardless of the partitions. Thus literature written by Polish authors for Polish readers was charged with important nation-building responsibilities.

Most literary activity in the partitioned Poland in the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century was affected by the political situation, which also shaped the reception of foreign literature along with translations and extended critical discussions (or a lack thereof). In the aftermath of the partitions, Polish writers felt obliged to help maintain national identity by creating works that would strengthen a sense of belonging to a common Polish culture bisected by the artificially imposed partition borders. Literature became a crucial factor in preserving Polish national identity and expressing the national
spirit, and reading books by Polish authors was conceived as a kind of patriotic duty. Polish literature of the period was preoccupied with patriotic themes, had to cope with censorship, and began to spread the idea of ‘organic work’ leading to economic and cultural self-improvement. In such an intellectual climate, there was little interest in foreign literature, thus few translations were published. Polish publishers felt duty bound to produce books that could benefit the nation by popularizing Polish history, describing lives of eminent Poles, or providing knowledge about various areas of Poland.¹

Polish literary critics in Stevenson’s times viewed literature mainly through the prism of its social and moral functions devoting most of their attention to the works written by their countrymen. New developments in European – mainly French and German – literature were usually presented in survey articles published in periodicals. Rarely did they focus on the nineteenth-century poetry or prose written in English: with the exception of Charles Dickens, who was popular in Poland, other Victorian writers were known from few translations and were not much read or commented on. In her pioneering study of the reception of English literature in Poland in the years 1887-1918, Wanda Krajewska points out that although the names of the best-known English writers of the last decades of the nineteenth century were mentioned in Polish literary journals, the reviewers usually devoted just a few sentences to briefly delineate their literary output. What was missing was a ‘detailed analysis and a deeper characterization of their works’.²

In the light of the above facts, it is not surprising that the first translations of Robert Louis Stevenson’s works appeared in Poland relatively late, at a time when the author of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was already at the peak of his popularity in English-speaking countries. Polish readers became acquainted with Stevenson through the translation of the first short story from ‘The Suicide Club’, ‘A Story of the young Man with the Cream
Tarts’ which was printed in 1888 in a Warsaw weekly Wędrowiec that had a circulation of approximately nine thousand copies.³ It was followed by Olalla, which appeared in a book form in 1889 in a series Biblioteka Dziennika Polskiego published in Lviv. The Merry Men and Other Tales were serialised in a daily Gazeta Lwowska in 1890 (nr 90 and nrs 93-99); each number had an average circulation of a thousand copies.⁴ An anonymous free translation was given a rather sensationalised title Straszne opowieści (Horrifying Tales). Treasure Island, whose translator was identified only by initials W. P., was issued in 1892 under the Polish title Skarby na wyspie (Treasures on the island). Prince Otto, translated by Cecylia Niewiadomska was published in 1897 in a Warsaw literary magazine Tygodnik Ilustrowany (circulation: seven thousand copies)⁵ under the title Przygody księcia Ottona (The Adventures of Prince Otto). In 1902 anonymous translations of ‘The Suicide Club’ and ‘The Rajah’s Diamond’ from New Arabian Nights were published in instalments in Ilustracya Polska (an illustrated weekly magazine produced in Lviv between 1901-1904 by the publishers of the largest daily paper Słowo Polskie which circulated ten thousand copies).⁶ In 1909 The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde translated by Maria Rakowska appeared as a part of popular series the Library of Select Works that had a print run of 6000 copies.⁷ In the same year the Polish edition of The Treasure of Franchard by an anonymous translator was distributed by the Spółka Wydawnicza Polska publishers. The book was a part of the series called The New Universal Library (launched in 1887 as The New Universal Library of European Literature Masterpieces) renowned for its high editorial standards, promotions for subscribers, and affordable prices. Although readers were only moderately interested in Polish translations of Stevenson’s works, and there were no additional print runs after the first edition, it must be noted that due to the publication of Stevenson’s tales in journals and popular series, several thousand Polish readers had a chance to acquaint
Critical reception of Stevenson’s oeuvre in Poland was shaped by a small group of reviewers whose articles treated new developments in English-language literature in more than a passing manner, and offered a broader and comprehensive perspective on British literature. One of them was Edmund Naganowski (1853-1915), who received his Master of Arts degree from the University of Dublin. He decided to remain in Ireland, where he worked as a teacher in Waterford grammar school. In 1886 he moved to London and was employed by the British Museum. Naganowski became a foreign correspondent of several Polish newspapers and journals, among others Biblioteka Warszawska, a prestigious literary monthly published in Warsaw from 1841 to 1914. In 1891 Naganowski published there an extensive article entitled ‘English critics and writers’ in which he highly praised Stevenson’s works. Naganowski maintained that twice as many novels were published in England as in other European countries, commented on the ‘omnivorous reading’ of Englishmen from all social classes, and discussed English book market as shaped by the growing demand for new ‘triple-decker’ novels sparked by the circulating libraries such as Mudie’s which dominated the trade in novels. He argued that contemporary English literature was ‘tyrannised by the narrow-minded British matron – Mistress Grundy’ because publishers were unwilling to take risks on books that could offend her prudish sensibilities. Naganowski pointed out that Stevenson, unlike other writers (for example, Kipling, who was better known in Poland at that time) ‘avoided the danger’ of ‘pandering to popular tastes’. Stevenson settled down ‘on an island in the Pacific, and there he writes masterpieces which are eagerly read in America, but not in England where his works are not published in affordable editions; Mrs Grundy removed them from her catalogue’. Obviously, Naganowski was unfamiliar with the actual sales figures for Stevenson’s works in England. He seems to suggest that the physical distance that separates
Stevenson from England gives him creative freedom: he does not have to follow the rules of conventional propriety and worry about Mrs Grundy’s approval, and he can ‘choose [...] topics in response to social needs, create masterpieces which give rise to polemics and inspire worthy initiatives’.\(^\text{10}\)

Another influential literary critic of the time, Leon Winiarski (1865-1915), wrote about Stevenson in one of his sketches on contemporary English literature printed in Prawda, a weekly on politics, society and literature, which appeared in Warsaw from 1881 to 1915. In 1894 Winiarski published an extensive review of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – a text that remained unknown to Polish readers at the time. He compared Stevenson’s novella to Edgar Allan Poe’s tales, and maintained that Stevenson’s story ‘based on a scientific principle’ does not inspire fear in its readers, unlike Poe’s works, yet it has psychological significance. He characterised Stevenson as a writer who possessed a uniquely contemporary sensibility that allowed him to express deep social fears that an immoral savage resides within even the most civilised individuals. Winiarski pointed out that Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was predicated on the current psychological notion of multiple personality and the coexistence of good and evil within one person. He claimed that Stevenson must have been familiar with modern theories of hypnosis and spiritualism. In the same review Winiarski commented on New Arabian Nights, praising Stevenson for paying meticulous attention to literary form and for his philosophical outlook upon human life.\(^\text{11}\)

Stevenson’s poetry, however, was treated with a significant lack of enthusiasm. Naganowski, who earlier admired Stevenson’s prose ‘masterpieces’, in an 1892 article ‘Kronika londyńska’ (‘London Chronicle’) published in Biblioteka Warszawska, wrote that Stevenson’s Ballads prove that their author ‘did not receive the blessings of the Muses’.\(^\text{12}\)

Stevenson’s death in 1894 was noted by Polish reviewers: obituary articles by Naganowski, Winiarski, Mścisław Edgar
Nekanda-Trepka, and Michał H. Drzewiecki, a scholar associated with the Jagiellonian University, appeared in literary magazines published in Warsaw and Cracow. Naganowski called Stevenson one of the finest contemporary novelists, echoing the sentiments expressed in the British press. Nekanda-Trepka is slightly more reserved in his evaluation of Stevenson’s literary significance: he admits that Stevenson’s great popularity, caused primarily by fascinating plots of his novels, is highly deserved; yet he thinks that the British press exaggerated in calling Stevenson ‘the finest novelist of the time’ and in considering his death ‘a devastating loss’ for English literature, because English literature is characterised by ‘such a wealth of talent that the loss of one – however excellent – writer will not impoverish it’.\textsuperscript{13} In his extensive obituary, Nekanda-Trepka provides the Polish reader with an outline of Stevenson’s life, and points out that his literary oeuvre encompassed various genres: poetry, travel writing, essays and novels. He appreciates Stevenson’s literary imagination and claims that the author of \textit{Treasure Island} ‘possessed the rare talent to accompany his presentation of a fantastic and improbable event with such a wealth of realistic detail that it is impossible to tell where truth and fantasy diverge’.\textsuperscript{14} He highly values \textit{Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde} for its masterful representation of the duality of human nature. Interestingly, it is Stevenson’s essays – the works that were unknown in Poland at the time – that inspire Nekanda-Trepka’s greatest admiration; he considers Stevenson to be on a par with the greatest essayist in the English language. He praises Stevenson’s nuanced and subtle literary style, and points out that regardless of the topic, Stevenson always manages to inspire the minds of his readers. His ‘harmonious language, vivid imagination and youthful optimism’ appeal to everyone.\textsuperscript{15}

Eight years after Stevenson’s death, Leon Winiarski wrote a review of Graham Balfour’s \textit{The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson} and \textit{The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson} edited by Sidney Colvin (none of them has been translated into Polish). Discussing
the development of Stevenson’s personality and the evolution of his literary style and technique, Winiarski expresses his steadily increasing regard for a protean quality and complexity of Stevenson’s oeuvre.\textsuperscript{16} It is somewhat paradoxical that Polish literary critics at this early stage of Stevenson’s reception in Poland failed to inspire the interest of translators and readers in such features of Stevenson’s writing that they valued the most. Their high appreciation for Stevenson’s essays or their admiration for the modernist aspects of his narrative technique did not result in any new translations, and the Polish readers at the time regarded Stevenson mainly as the author noted for his adventure stories with sensational plots.

A growing interest in English literature in general and in Stevenson’s works in particular as well as a significant reappraisal of Stevenson’s position in the Polish canon of English literature became noticeable in Poland in the second decade of the twentieth century. Both may be attributed to the influence of Stanisław Brzozowski (1878 – 1911), a Polish philosopher, publicist and literary critic deeply familiar with the works not only of Polish but also European authors of the nineteenth century, who was recognised as ‘one of the most fertile and fascinating Polish thinkers of the twentieth century’.\textsuperscript{17} His magnum opus, \textit{The Legend of Young Poland: Studies on the Structure of a Cultural Soul} was published in 1909, two years before his premature death at 33, and the second edition followed in 1910. Considered to be his most important philosophical work, which offered staunch criticism of Polish contemporary culture, known as Young Poland or Neo-Romanticism, \textit{The Legend of Young Poland} galvanised its readers and sparked vigorous debates. As Czesław Milosz writes in \textit{The History of Polish Literature}, ‘within Brzozowski’s lifetime, \textit{The Legend of Young Poland} was his only book to have the effect of a bombshell’.\textsuperscript{18} According to Stanislaw Eile \textit{The Legend of Young Poland} ‘represents the most comprehensive denunciation of those forms of the Polish mind,
which, in Brzozowski’s words represent “the delusion of cultural consciousness”. [...] He was convinced that all humans reflected their economic and social conditions. Therefore Romantic attempts at controlling life from above that is, from high “prophetic” posts of national bards – are regarded as misconceived and deceptive’.19 As an acute cultural critic, Brzozowski stressed the obligation of artists to engage in diagnosing social reality of their times and in shaping social structure. He maintained that economic relations and working conditions are human products, and not consequences of any objective mechanism; art and literature are testimonies to their times rather than expressions or reflections of the independent mind of the artist.

Brzozowski’s interest in English literature was inspired by Hippolyte Taine’s *History of English Literature* which he considered to be a monumental achievement, and to which he devoted his 1902 study *Hipolit Taine jako estetyk i krytyk* [Hippolyte Taine as an aesthetician and a critic]. He shared Taine’s belief that race, milieu, and moment constitute the three principal conditioning factors behind any work of art. Brzozowski’s own notion of literature as the resultant of the level of culture, economy, and history of a given country owes much to Taine’s thought. Brzozowski considered English culture to be the most advanced in Europe and he believed that it reached its superior level due to specific historic and economic circumstances. Britain’s high level of industrialisation combined with its role in the colonization processes shaped British sense of responsibility and conviction that a human being can actively shape the surrounding world. Brzozowski’s admiration for English literature arises out of such beliefs. He claims that English literature is the richest in Europe, because it is rooted in the most developed culture. Its most important feature is the representation of life as a process; the process created by an autonomous human being who manages to maintain close ties with society and nation. He values English literature for its continuous attempts to synthesise different
intellectual traditions as well as for a reflection of what he calls ‘modern productivity.’ He writes in a characteristic idiom of the epoch:

English literature has grown in a much closer relationship with an economic activity of a nation than any other European literature. The writer has not been as different from the entrepreneur as it has been the case in France, Germany, or our country. English literature thinks and feels using a steel organ of modern productivity. As a part of his implicit tradition, the English writer shares the sense of connection with the world of economic energy. Perhaps it has happened thanks to sailing and the sea. The sea is the constant epos which permeates every moment of English life: thanks to the sea purely economic values have gained aesthetic dimension. [...] English literature treats economy as a collaborative work for which every individual shares responsibility. [...] English literature treats a human being as an active agent, as a responsible source of energy.

Brzozowski considers Stevenson as a writer who embodies what he calls ‘superiority of English culture, English national organism’ (p. 387). He points out that ‘such prosaic objects as marine vessels’ influence aesthetics: ‘Modern world, woven together through the power of technology and industry’ finds a concrete representation in Stevenson’s works, for such a world is deeply rooted in his English sensibility.

Another reason for Brzozowski’s admiration for Stevenson is his use of the genre of Arabian tale in a Western context. Stevenson’s ‘masterful’ juxtaposition of East and West results in cultural critique and contributes to the knowledge of the self (p. 385). West conceived in the form characteristic of East reveals its pathos and its ‘coruscating autonomy’, writes Brzozowski, praising Stevenson for his ‘profound wisdom and [...] truly Platonic
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irony’ (pp. 385-6). Brzozowski views the exoticism of Stevenson’s tales as a reaction against the excesses of industrialization leading to repetitive routine and mechanization of life. Brzozowski maintains that

Severe and deep truth sounds through the silvery childlike laughter of [Stevenson’s] books: wherever you are, you can depend only on yourself, on your strength, on your courage of initiative and action. If you do not understand this, you will not become your own support – you will be governed not be a miracle, but by life that exists beyond you. ‘Wherever you are, straighten up in the face of God and act,’ act as if no deed, no act of will, ever perished. Sinking to the bottom [...] think in such a way as if your last will were to become a motto and an order for eternity; till your last moment – you, who exist, be a maker, a doer.

(p. 387)

He admires Stevenson for representing fictional worlds that are not ready-made constructs but rather environments shaped and transformed by individual agency. Such is Stevenson’s ‘smiling wisdom,’ claims Brzozowski, that his books can dispel ‘the tragic fog’ that surrounds, for example, literary characters created by Henrik Ibsen (p. 387).

Referring to ‘silvery [...] laughter’ and ‘smiling wisdom’ of Stevenson, Brzozowski draws attention to what he considers an essential characteristic feature of English literature, that is its humour. For Brzozowski, English humour is

more than a literary form, it is a certain kind of deeply modern national religion, it is a spiritual state which makes it possible [...] to consciously participate in the creation of modern life; it is a spiritual state which strengthens our desire to act and does not limit our intel-
Humour, claims Brzozowski, allows to invest one’s life with just a provisionary sense, and thus it leaves space for its further transformation; it teaches how to overcome ‘the habit of thinking about oneself in closed categories’ and how to advance a more creative attitude towards the world (pp. 378-9). Brzozowski believes that Stevenson’s humour can provide a valuable lesson to Polish readers, who should develop a more modern and productive outlook upon life. Another thing that he wants his countrymen to learn from Stevenson is the importance of individual responsibility and collaborative work – a crucial lesson for the partitioned country if it were ever to regain statehood and independence thanks to a conscious and concerted effort of its people.

Brzozowski, who passed away in 1911, did not live long enough to rejoice at Poland regaining its statehood in 1918; neither did he witness a growing interest of Polish readers in English literature. In the decade following the publication of *The Legend of Young Poland*, and an essay by Brzozowski entitled ‘On the ennobling effect of English literature’ which appeared in 1910, the number of Stevenson’s works available to the Polish reader grew to twenty, and they included among others, ‘My Shadow’ and ‘The Isle of Voices’. A broader availability of Stevenson’s works in Poland was a part of a larger cultural phenomenon with many new translations of works by English authors being published. However, the quality of these translations left much to be desired. Despite an increased interest in English literature, few people in Poland actually knew the language or were familiar with English culture. French was the most popular foreign language taught in Poland, and there was no significant academic tradition of English studies at Polish universities. The first English Department was established at Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1911, but the graduating classes usually numbered
fewer than 25 students, most of whom did not choose the career of a literary translator. Lamenting the low calibre of Polish translations of English literature in the early decades of the twentieth century, Witold Chwalewik, an eminent literary critic, wrote: ‘no wonder that such translations do little to bring English culture closer to us or to facilitate mutual understanding’.21

Against such a backdrop, the publication of a new translation of *Treasure Island* by Józef Birkenmajer in 1925 was a significant event, because of the translation’s exceptionally high quality. Birkenmajer (1897-1939), a literary critic, but also a poet and an author of well-received short stories, turned out to be an outstanding translator of English literature. In addition to Stevenson’s novels, he translated, among others, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Kipling’s *The Jungle Book, Kim*, and *Stalky & Co*. Birkenmajer’s translation of *Treasure Island* was included in a best-selling series *The World of Travel and Adventure: The Cycle of Swashbucking Novels* by the Wydawnictwo Polskie owned by Rudolf Wegner. Noted for the high editorial standards, Wegner was a prestigious publisher of critically acclaimed Polish and foreign literary fiction, known for the series *The Library of Nobel Prize Winners*. The publication of Stevenson’s novel by such a top-tier publisher attests to a growing recognition of Stevenson’s literary accomplishments in Poland.

Birkenmajer’s version of the title: *Wyspa skarbów* is a direct rendition of the English title, and at the same time a catchy and elegant Polish phrase. An earlier translation of the novel – the already mentioned 1892 version by W. P. entitled *Skarby na wyspie* did not enjoy a particularly positive reception, and had never been reissued. The fate of Birkenmajer’s work was different. Generally considered to be an excellent rendering of Stevenson’s prose, it quickly became very popular. Encouraged by the success of his *Treasure Island* translation, Birkenmajer turned his hand to *Kidnapped*. The 1927 translation, under the Polish title *Porwany za młodu* (Kidnapped as a youth), appeared as
another instalment of *The World of Travel and Adventure* series. Stevenson’s novel received positive reviews and enjoyed brisk sales. It is worth mentioning that also in 1927 another Polish version of *Kidnapped* appeared in bookstores. Translated by Stefan Piekarski, the two-volume edition was given a rather clumsy title *Dziecko sprzedane, albo pamiętnik przygód Dawida Balfoura w r.p. 1751* (The Sold Child, or The Memoir of Adventures of David Balfour from 1751 A.D.). The book was issued by a Warsaw publisher Polski Dom Wydawniczy; it could not compete, however, with Birkenmajer’s translation of *Kidnapped*, made a loss for the publisher and was never reprinted.

It would be reasonable to expect that after the success of *Kidnapped*, Birkenmajer would turn his hand to its sequel, *Catriona*; yet somewhat surprisingly, the next Stevenson’s novel that Birkenmajer chose to introduce to Polish readers was not *Catriona* (its Polish edition translated by Jan Meysztowicz was published in 1956), but *The Master of Ballantrae*: Birkenmayer’s translation of Stevenson’s novel appeared in 1935. He also made an isolated attempt at familiarizing Polish readers with Stevenson’s poetry for children: the poem ‘To Alison Cunningham’ in Birkenmajer’s translation was printed in the 41 number of Warsaw weekly *Prosto z mostu* in 1938 under the tile ‘Do niani’ (‘To a nanny’).

It is difficult to determine how many copies of Stevenson’s books in Birkenmajer’s translation were sold in Poland in the early decades of the twentieth century because the publishers did not share their circulation figures. The Retrospective Bibliography of the National Library of Poland does not include complete information concerning individual print runs. On the basis of the available data, it can be estimated that a typical edition of a novel translated from the English language varied between two thousand and two thousand five-hundred copies, while the editions of popular novels by Polish writers numbered as many as fifteen thousand copies. It might be assumed that it
had been more profitable for the publishers to publish translations of several different works in small numbers than to risk a large edition of one book that might not sell enough copies to recoup the initial outlay. However, the first edition of *The Treasure Island* sold out, and the Wydawnictwo Polskie published the second edition in 1930.

Stevenson’s novels translated by Birkenmajer were not only popular with the readers but also enjoyed positive critical reception. A number of prominent reviewers, e.g., Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa of an influential Catholic monthly *Przegląd Powszechny* and Witold Chwalewik of *Rocznik Literacki* – an annual publication of the Literary Institute of Warsaw – praised Stevenson as the ancestor of the contemporary adventure novel and highly admired Stevenson’s insightful characterizations, his masterful style, and his ability to create engaging and exciting plots. In 1930 the second edition of *Treasure Island* translated by Birkenmajer was noted by the highly regarded cultural weekly *Kultura* which first published a review of the novel by Janina Brossowa, and followed with a comprehensive biographical essay about Stevenson written by Stanisław Helsztyński (1891-1986), a distinguished historian of English literature. It is worth mentioning that Birkenmajer’s translation of *Treasure Island* has remained popular also in the 21st century, for only in 2013 two different Polish publishers, Buchmann and Bellona, produced new editions of Birkenmajer’s work, despite the fact that four different versions of *Treasure Island* by other translators were published in the second half of the twentieth century. Elżbieta Kurowska, the author of a monograph on the reception of English literature in Poland, has pointed out that Birkenmajer’s translations of Stevenson’s works occupy ‘a permanent position in Polish culture’.

It may be concluded that the early reception of Robert Louis Stevenson in Poland was shaped by social and political circumstances, but also influenced by contributions of two men:
Stanislaw Brzozowski and Józef Birkenmajer. In the partitioned Poland, scant interest in Stevenson’s oeuvre was due to the pre-occupation of publishers, readers and literary critics with Polish literature viewed as a vehicle to maintain national identity threatened by the policies of the imperial powers. Critics commenting on Stevenson’s works, some of whom were based in Britain, often reflected the views of the British press. When Poland regained its independence in 1918, in the aftermath of World War I, Polish literature became liberated from its nation-building responsibilities; consequently, reading the works of Polish authors was no longer perceived as a patriotic obligation. As a result, the reading public felt free to explore new literary terrains, which created a steadily growing demand for new translations of foreign works. Yet, the individual impact of Stanislaw Brzozowski and Józef Birkenmajer cannot be overestimated. First, Brzozowski, whose high appreciation of English literature in general coupled with his enthusiasm for Stevenson in particular found an eloquent expression in *The Legend of Young Poland*, kindled Polish publishers’ and readers’ interest in the works of the author of *Treasure Island*. Second, Birkenmajer provided the interested reader with high-quality translations of Stevenson’s novels. Birkenmajer was universally praised for his graceful and vigorous prose style, which managed to convey Stevenson’s narratives in ways that were attractive and accessible to Polish readers. Thanks to Birkenmajer’s seamless rendering of Stevenson’s language into Polish, readers felt at home in the world of Stevenson’s novels. Yet, at the same time, they were reminded that it is a world other than theirs; a world that is exotic, exciting and thus appealing and intriguing. Birkenmajer almost singlehandedly established Stevenson’s canon in Poland. It must be admitted that this canon is severely limited – almost a century after the publication of Birkenmajer’s translation of *Treasure Island*, the Polish reader still waits to discover Stevenson’s essays or his poetry.
NOTES
2 Wanda Krajewska, Recepcja literatury angielskiej w Polsce w okresie modernizmu (1887-1918), (Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1972), p. 129.
4 www.cracovia-leopolis.pl.
9 Naganowski, p. 600.
10 Ibid., p. 605.
11 Leon Winiarski, ‘L. Stevenson: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’, Prawda, 24 (1894), 281-84 (p. 282).
14 Nekanda-Trepka, p. 137.
15 Ibid.


23 Kurowska, p. 39.