

Jerzy Pele¹

Barbara Stanosz
(born in Warsaw, 8th January 1935
died in Warsaw, 7th June 2014)

If we developed a habit of placing keywords in biographies, her person and life would be best suited by “rebellious independence”, “daring”, “courage”, “rationalised radicalism” and “succinctness”. Klemens Szaniawski would jokingly remark that Barbara wrote only brief summaries of her own works. She treated it as a compliment, and rightly so. Her satisfaction while reminiscing these words was apparent. The conciseness of her utterances sometimes had a nearly hypnotic effect.

She was an exceptionally stubborn soul, striving towards her goals against all odds. Very Polish in her nature, she loved and practiced freedom as the core value associated with democracy rather than the Polish nobility. She regarded the no smoking policy as an assault on her own freedom and citizen rights. Therefore, she cured her chronic bronchitis with packages upon packages of cigarettes smoked daily, nourishing her future fatal disease day by day; from her lungs, it spread to her brain, the organ that had been working so well, and soundly, within her.

She entered the philosophical faculty in Warsaw during the worst period, probably before Commissary Wyszynski proclaimed mathematics, and logic as part of it, not to be the “leading force” in the fight for spreading Marxism-Stalinism all over the world. Only after this partial acquittal could these disciplines, freed from the tasks of battle forces, become a refuge – in exceptional cases, also for the politically independent researchers. Still, the “production meetings” of the Polish Youth Association, socialist work discipline and competition of workers “fighting” to exceed the 100% of the norm persisted all around; posters warned of the “spitting dwarves of the

Home Army”; deeds to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution were proclaimed; on the 1st May and 22nd July people were sent to compulsory marches and demonstrations; before elections and the “Three Times Yes” referendum, all-night vigils were organised in university halls to make sure that the “class enemy”, made up to boost the socialist alertness, did not attack undercover; state collective farms were aided in their harvesting actions; students underwent their exams in groups of three: let there be witnesses that a failing grade was not a “reactionary” assault of the class enemy, waged from “you know what positions” on “the youth activists”, who tried to defend their apparent ignorance with the unquestionable argument: “we were revising as a collective!”.

In such a situation, I do not know how the student Barbara Zatryb fared. On one hand, she had excelled at her school leaving examination. On the other hand, she had an individuality well characterised by her novel-worthy surname (“Zatryb” is the imperative form of the colloquial Polish word for “understand”), additionally tainted by her suspicious background: a daughter of a professional soldier, lieutenant or captain of the bourgeoisie-originated Home Army, who did not return after September 1939, leaving behind the four-year-old Basia (Barbara) and her mother. After Barbara graduated with flying colours, gaining her master’s degree in philosophy, she managed – despite some opposition from the Party – to get a job at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw, which was an important part of the “ideological front”. The decision to employ her was soon justified by the rapid development of the young academic, her publications and the position she had gained with her superiors, colleagues and students. Thanks to these achievements in the very beginning of her career, she deserved the introduction of “a rising star of our philosophy of language” during one international symposium. However, her professional success was not accompanied by a financial one: the scant salary of an academic assistant could not satisfy the material needs of the family of (at first) two. She and her mother struggled with poverty, as they had done since Barbara’s early childhood. A few years later, Barbara changed her surname to her husband’s, Stanosz, equally novel-worthy and emphasizing the tendency to be independent (“stanąć” being Polish for “to stand”). On their own, Barbara and her mother, for as long as she lived, soon started raising their respective son and grandson as well as another beloved and important family member, their dog. After her mother’s death, Barbara, as the only provider for the three, had to carry the entire burden on her own shoulders. Her material situation forced her to accept one extra job after another. These

were not “odd jobs”, though, but always new and valuable works which gave our literature splendid translations of the world philosophy, complete with masterpiece introductions, analyses and commentaries. But this was not all. Barbara wanted to dress fashionably but did not have enough money. Hence, she sewed herself a fur or sheepskin coat – which of the two, I do not remember. It turned out that she could also live up to the role of a furrier.

Her strong personality, ambition and pride, as well as a decisiveness which was visible even in her handwriting, were leading her towards the role of a soloist rather than a team worker. She agreed to join the Collegium Invisibile (a Polish association providing tutelage to academically talented students) but only as an ordinary tutor, leaving the honourable places to less deserving ones. It required a lot of effort to convince her to allow for her nomination to the Warsaw Scientific Society, which she left after some time, in 2008, on her own request; for what reason, I know not. She would not be convinced, however, to join the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences or the Institut International de Philosophie, which she undoubtedly deserved in both cases and to which she could have been certain of being chosen.

As far as confrontation was concerned, she surely preferred duels to round table panel discussions. She also valued attack more than defence. When certain of being in the right, she was unwilling to show generous understanding to her opponent. “Let him humble himself” – she once said when asked to “spare shame” to a defeated adversary. At the same time, she was always ready to defend another’s endangered or violated rights and stormed against those who limited the freedom of speech, conscience or thought. She would not look at her own safety or the price she was about to pay. And pay she did, dearly and – considering her situation as a lonely mother – very painfully. For one act of opposition against a violation of civil rights, she lost her job at the University of Warsaw and for months she had to commute to Częstochowa to earn a living by holding commissioned classes in a higher education establishment there. For some reason unknown to me, she retired early, a great loss for students and yet another material loss for her.

She was a talented and passionate teacher, working with real mastery. We taught and examined the same groups of students for years. One time, when she thought I graded a student too severely, she instructed me: ‘one need not have very good knowledge to be graded “very good”’. I remembered this remark well. Thus, in 1971, when I was giving Barbara a lift in my first East German-made two-door Trabant car to her home at Polna street, near Plac Unii Lubelskiej (having made a huge effort, as every beginner driver,

to plan the route so that I had to turn left as little as possible), and heard from the courageous passenger that I was a “very good driver”, I understood the praise adequately as it reminded me of that earlier teaching hint. Her contact with the young generation was facilitated, and the bonds tightened, by the fact that she clung to her youth. The students felt this and thanks to this attitude, saw an ally in her. The way she taught and the lot of work she put into it – also by publishing her lecture and tutorial materials – and even the high demands she put on them were rewarded by respect, appreciation, attachment, gratitude and sympathy.

Besides her teaching, her temperament brought her towards journalism as a form of civic activity. She published in a periodical co-initiated and co-founded by her. The title of the bimonthly adequately illustrated its main thought and program: anti-irrationalism and criticism, driven by reason and governed by logic – “Bez Dogmatu” (“Without Dogma”). Without any dogma whatsoever, be it religious or party-political, calling to internationalism (but not cosmopolitanism! – as the Polish United Workers’ Party emphasised) that strove towards the worldwide rule of the peoples’ masses. Without the superstitions born of emotions and imagination: the fear of annihilation and the rebellion against the inevitability of one’s own non-existence; and of desires and dreams to protect the humanity from what Tadeusz Kotarbiński called “elementary catastrophes”. She made the case for the freedom of conscience. She decidedly opposed any violation or limitation of minorities’ rights. She was making way for progressive thought.

Not without reason was Tadeusz Kotarbiński mentioned here. She still had a chance to listen to his lectures. If some of their ethical ideas transpired to her mind, these were rather not the “quaker” elements or the rejection of “tone, expression and sarcasm” postulated and recommended by him but foreign to the personality of the combat-ready oppositionist that Barbara was. More likely, she learned what Kotarbiński himself had characterised with the sentence “I have always chewed on the bit and chew on the bit I will”. Her world view and the judgements she uttered loudly brought attacks from both sides. So many compatriots wanted to tell her directly what they thought about her in a sincere “Pole-to-Pole” talk that she was forced to change her telephone number. Before she clandestinely gave me the new one, a pause occurred in our phone calls, infrequent anyway, as besides the classes, which neither of us lacked, she would rest between 3 in the morning and 1-2 in the afternoon and work in the afternoons, evenings and partly nights.

Whose fledgling was she? Barbara's PhD supervisor was Roman Suszko; the thesis was titled *Funkcje znaczeniowe wyrażen w ujęciu logiki formalnej* [*Functions of expressions: a formal logic approach*]. The choice of the dissertation topic heralded her future academic focus: logic of natural language. In the paper *Roman Suszko na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim* [*Roman Suszko at the University of Warsaw*] in *Sens, prawda, wartość – filozofia języka i nauki...* [*Sense, truth, value – philosophy of language and science...*] (Warsaw 2006, Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej, vol. 50), she recollects an occurrence from the time of her writing the thesis. I remember her being impatient and nervous when her doctoral defence date was delayed; this could have ended in it passing her thirtieth birthday on 8th January 1965 after she had made it a matter of honour to gain the academic title before that date – she managed. When I once asked her whom she regards as her academic master, she said “Roman Suszko”. She may have also gained a lot from the academic contact with Janina Kotarbińska, which gave her a chance to learn inquisitiveness, diligence, critical thoroughness, unbiased forming of opinions and determination in keeping her ground on the essentials. It was from her own personality, though, that she took the unwavering courage. In Barbara's writings there are no expressions of uncertainty such as “it seems” or “presumably”. Her concentrated works decree on the things as they are in a truly manly manner. She succinctly brought up the quintessence of the described thoughts of others, showing what was their most important part, naming the major advantages, disadvantages and controversies and presenting her own stance. She did not have to compromise any of her concision for the sake of didactic persuasion, repetitions according to the rule “*repetitio est mater studiorum*” or diversification of form – her style of writing was far from all those anyway. She wrote only as much as was needed to present the issue adequately, without a single redundant word. I sometimes thought students should receive a bottle of thinner with each of Barbara's books to be able to swallow such a concentrated concoction.

Barbara's academic face was undoubtedly strongly influenced by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz. For some time, she was charmed by his mind and overpowered by his brilliant intellect. However, it seems that she was not convinced by Ajdukiewicz's radical conventionalism, just as the semantic and ontological thought of Kotarbiński's reism had not broken through the robust wall of her individuality.

I am under the impression that the stages of her academic development were marked by changes of theoretical predilections: Carnap, Ajdukiewicz, Chomsky, Quine, Davidson. She drew the borders of her privacy and in-

dependence wide; no one unauthorised was allowed inside. Once, at the beginning of her academic pilgrimage, I jokingly remarked that we might have been witnessing a change in her taste, swaying from Carnap towards Ajdukiewicz; she reacted in a surprisingly abrupt way, saying she did not wish her personal academic sympathies to be interpreted. I had apparently dared to trespass upon the carefully guarded territory of her intimacy.

The axis of her researcher's mind stretched between language and cognition, with issues of philosophy of language and logic of language wrapped around it. Language was a window offering a view on cognitive processes. She regarded the logicised philosophy of language as a gateway to the entire philosophy, which allowed her to perceive its wide landscapes. She did her research in the spirit of analytical philosophy, rather American than Oxford style. From the university offer, she always chose lectures and tutorials for psychologists, which were an extension of her theoretical interests and research. She believed that every student of arts and social sciences needed a "good course in formal logic". We did not agree on that point: why disappoint the youngsters who sought to flee mathematics under the wings of the liberal arts? In my opinion, a general logic course after the fashion of *Elements* by Tadeusz Kotarbiński and *Pragmatic logic* by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, tailored to the needs of the given field of study, would be more useful.

She never used the name "semiotics", abiding by the terms "philosophy of language" and "logic of language". She was also distrustful towards the field of semiotic research at first. At the beginning, back in the 1960s, she sarcastically asked me, "when is this happening of yours taking place?" as she was going to attend it. Even though the name did not convince her, from the very beginning she actively participated, as a speaker, in worldwide and countrywide semiotic events in Europe and the USA and she entrusted several of her works to semiotics-oriented publishers, *Studia Semiotyczne* and *Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej*.

The volume *Logiczne podstawy języka* [*Logical Foundations of Language*], Wrocław 1976, Ossolineum, co-authored by Adam Nowaczyk, is one of the books published as a part of the semiotic research program *Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość* [Sign – Language – Reality], which has been going since the 1960s until the present day. Other parts of the program are: the journal *Studia Semiotyczne*, published since 1970, in whose volume XXVIII–XXIX I am writing these words, as well as the series of books called *Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej* [Library of Semiotic Thought], started in 1990, whose 54th volume – and hopefully not the last one – was published in 2013. In the *Logical Foundations of Language*, the two authors consistently use the plural,

taking common responsibility for all the thoughts. It is surely possible to guess which parts of the book can be attributed to Barbara Stanosz and which ones to Adam Nowaczyk; that said, a future historian of science should rather ask this vital piece of information of the other author, remembering that they certainly consulted the entire content with each other, than make assumptions. Other works by Barbara Stanosz in the series Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej are *10 wykładów z filozofii języka* [*10 lectures on the philosophy of language*] (BMS vol. 19, Warsaw 1991) and *Logika języka naturalnego* [*Logic of natural language*] (BMS vol. 43, Warsaw 1999); besides these, BMS vol. 46, Warsaw 2000, with the title *Język współczesnej humanistyki* [*The language of the contemporary humanities*], included her article *Bełkot i przesąd* [*Gibberish and superstition*] and the already mentioned vol. 50 *Sens, prawda, wartość: filozofia języka i nauki...* – another article with the title *Kazimierza Ajdukiewicza pojęcie racjonalności* [*Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's notion of rationality*]. *Studia Semiotyczne* published her following papers: *O pojęciu języka prelogicznego* [*On the notion of a prelogical language*] (in vol. I, 1970), *Kodeks języka naturalnego* [*Code of conduct for natural language*] (in vol. II, 1971), *Status pozanwczny semantyki* [*The cognitive status of semantics*] (in vol. V, 1974), *O ustalaniu znaczeń nieznanego języka* [*On Establishing the Meanings of Expressions of an Unknown Language*] (in vol. VI, 1975), *Teorie, modele i dane empiryczne w lingwistyce* [*Theories, Models and Empirical Data in Linguistics*] (in vol. X, 1980), *Uwagi do artykułu Renaty Grzegorzczkovej "Opis lingwistyczny a opis języka"* [*Comments on Mrs. Renata Grzegorzczk's Paper "Opis lingwistyczny a opis logiczny języka"*] ("*Linguistic description versus the logical description of language*") (in vol. XIX–XX, 1994), *Rozwiązywanie paradoksów* [*Paradox resolution*] (in vol. XXV, 2004). As a part of the semiotic research program *Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość*, she took active part in the following congresses, symposia and academic meetings as a keynote speaker, presenter or discussion participant, with lectures: *Semantyka Rudolfa Carnapa* [*Semantics of Rudolf Carnap*] (Department meeting, 1st April 1966), *O pojęciu języka prelogicznego* [*On the notion of a prelogical language*] (Department meeting, 11th May 1969), *Język a komunikacja* [*Language and communication*] (academic meeting of the Department of Logical Semiotics, University of Warsaw and the Polish Semiotic Society, 23rd November 1973), *Methodological status of semantics* (in the Polish Semiotic Seminar of the North American Semiotics Society Colloquium and 1975 Linguistic Institute Tampa, Florida, July 1975), *Theories, models and empirical data in linguistics* (International Semiotic Symposium, Radziejowice, 22nd–27th May 1978), *On a mysterious principle of mod-*

ern linguistics (International Symposium on Theoretical Semiotics: Verbal Signs – Visual Signs, Warsaw, 23rd–24th September 1980), *Deduction and the behavioristic concept of assertion* (Poland-wide logical conference Uzasadnianie w matematyce i filozofii [Justification in Mathematics and Philosophy] co-organised by the Polish Semiotic Society and the Polish-Bulgarian symposium Types of Logical Systems and Problems of Truth, Jabłonna, 27th–31st October 1983), *Przekład i znaczenie* [*Translation and meaning*] (academic meeting of the Department of Logical Semiotics, University of Warsaw and the Polish Semiotic Society, 27th March 1983), *Logicy i językoznawcy o języku* [*Logicians and linguists on language*] – discussion by Renata Grzegorzczuk, Barbara Stanosz, Waclaw Mejbaum and Jan Woleński (academic meeting of the research program Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość and the Polish Semiotic Society, 11th March 1995), *Język współczesnej humanistyki – o niejasności naukowych tekstów humanistycznych* [*Language of the contemporary humanities – on the lack of clarity of the academic writings in humanities*] – discussion by Barbara Stanosz, Henryk Hiż, Jacek Jadacki, Leon Koj, Jerzy Pelc and Bogusław Wolniewicz (academic session of the research program Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość and the Polish Semiotic Society, 12th April 1996), *Roman Suszko na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim* [*Roman Suszko at the University of Warsaw*] (academic session co-organised by the Warsaw Scientific Society, the research program Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość and the Polish Semiotic Society, 18th January 2002).

Some of these were later published in *Studia Semiotyczne* or in *Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej*. The above list does not include Barbara Stanosz's writings, lectures and presentations that were not part of the research program Znak – Język – Rzeczywistość. A proper place for those in the future would be a full bibliography of her works, prepared by her audience and readers as a sign of gratefulness for what they could learn from her. The academic achievements of Barbara Stanosz place her among the greatest Polish philosophers of language of the last fifty years.

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“It is dreadful how from a subject, you become an object”, she whispered as the coffin of Janina Kotarbińska was being placed in the grave.

The penultimate e-mail from Barbara came on the 19th April 2014. It was an answer to my question about how she was faring. I was about to ask her for an article for the *Studia Semiotyczne*. She wrote – as always – concisely and matter-of-factly. She started with a remark: “I presume our both situations might isomorphically map each other”; she informed me about her health and about having declined an operation. “Instead,” she wrote, “I decided to write a book (a popular-philosophical one, on the dualism of the human vision of the world – cognitive and world-view). I was doing quite well-” she went on explaining why her work was interrupted. The letter ended with the words: “I am sending you a warm embrace but let us not say goodbye yet!” I offered her technical help, like having the further part of the mentioned book dictated and recorded on a tape, and asked how we should stay in touch, by the telephone or through letters. On the 23rd April she wrote back: “For now I prefer the e-mail because things tend to fall from my right hand and I have not become accustomed to being one-handed yet. B.”

These were the last words from Barbara.

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