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Lechoń's Ephemeral Poems: People – Issues – Events in the New York Period

The concepts of “occasional poetry” and “ephemeral poetry” seem to enjoy neither special recognition nor too much interest from literary scholars, as if it was assumed that this is already a historical, somewhat marginal phenomenon, and the literary works of this genre, serving current purposes, have no special artistic qualities. According to the *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], “occasional poetry” and “ephemeral poetry”¹ are “poetic works related in terms of their topics to specific events in public life or the activities of well-known people.”

A certain type of archival finds related to Jan Lechoń prompted me to look into this strand of his work.

A simple comparison of the contents of the two, so far most important, editions of his poems – *Poezje* [Poems] (in the series “National Library,” Wrocław 1990) and *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems] (Toruń 1995) – edited by Roman Loth, indicate the lesser importance attached by the editor to “occasional and friendship-book poems” (as he titled one part of the second volume), because in *Poezje* [Poems] he included only one of the eight works of this nature that were later presented in *Poezje zebrane* [Collected

¹ M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], ed. J. Sławiński, 5th edition, unamended, Wrocław 2008, pp. (respectively) 353, 405–406.

poems]. It was a poem written in 1922 [inc.:], titled “To się jeszcze należy Pani, Panno Inko...” [This is still due to you, Miss Inka...] and dedicated to Inka Belina-Leszczyńska,² a daughter of actors Jerzy Leszczyński and Anna, who adopted the stage name of Anna Belina and who later, as the wife of diplomat Tadeusz Jackowski, hosted the poet many times in Wronczyn, the Jackowskis’ estate in the Wielkopolska region, where other rhymed entries were made in 1925 in the guestbook they kept.³ Their intimacy and friendship can be clearly evidenced by their surviving correspondence.⁴

In view of the dictionary definition, it must be concluded that Lechoń also wrote other ephemeral poems that meet both conditions to be qualified as part of the genre: they referred to “specific events in public life” or “well-known people”: a humorous poetic warning [inc.:] “Jeśliś damie chciał ubliżyć...” [If you wanted to insult a lady...], written in 1923 and addressed to Kornel Makuszyński after he published the volume *Moje listy* [My Letters]; a poetic address “Do Boya (Wiersz wygłoszony przez autora na bankiecie Polskiego Klubu Literackiego)” [To Boy (Poem delivered by the author at a banquet of the Polish Literary Club)] written in 1928; a 1929 entry in the “Pławowice Book” [inc.:] “...Aby uczcić cię, wsi błoga, i ty domu, kolumnowy” [...To honor you, blissful countryside, and you column house], perhaps made after the second of the famous Poets’ Convention in Pławowice, although it is otherwise known that in that year Lechoń was a guest of Nina and Ludwik Morstin also at other times; the “wedding toast” dedicated to Józef Wittlin’s daughter Elżbieta [inc.:] “Gdy angielskie i francuskie / Na cześć Twoją brzmią wiwaty...” [When the English and French / Cheers sound in your honor...] on the occasion of her wedding to Michel Lipton in 1951 in New York.⁵

² J. Lechoń, [inc.:] “To się jeszcze należy Pani, Panno Inko...” [This is still due to you, Miss Inka...], in: idem, *Poezje* [Poems], ed. R. Loth, Wrocław 1990, pp. 168–169; and in: idem, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems], ed. R. Loth, Toruń 1995, p. 243.

³ J. Lechoń, [inc.:] “Gdy mnie złych będzie myśli biła nawałnica...” [When I was beaten by a storm of bad thoughts...] and [inc.:] “Że te wiersze są w podarku...” [That these poems are a gift...], in: idem, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems], op. cit., pp. 244–246.

⁴ J. Lechoń, *Listy do Anny Jackowskiej* [Letters to Anna Jackowska], ed. R. Loth, Warsaw 1977, 208 pages.

⁵ See consecutively: J. Lechoń, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems], op. cit., pp. 247–253.

The last piece indicates that Lechoń did not abandon this kind of work while abroad. During my archival research in the United States, I had the opportunity to come across other evidence of his poetic activity of this nature.

The first piece of that evidence perfectly fits the dictionary definition of the role of occasional poetry, which involved a “direct and quick influence on the audience and shaping public opinion on ideological and political issues.” At the same time, it shows Lechoń’s characteristic keen interest in political affairs, while also presenting his unequivocal stance towards the presidential campaign taking place in the USA in 1948, which resulted in the election of Harry Truman and in which Mead,⁶ Pepper⁷ and Wallace,⁸ representatives of the Democratic Party criticized by the poet, took an active part. However, I have not been able to determine whether that propaganda poem (found in manuscript in Lechoń’s archive at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in New York) was the poet’s spontaneous reaction to current political events, or whether it was written at someone else’s request and possibly used in the public space.

This is because Lechoń wrote in these clearly propagandistic couplets:

⁶ James Michael Mead (1885–1964), a member of the House of Representatives from 1918, a senator from 1938; a candidate for the office of governor of the New York State in 1942 and 1946; a chairman of the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program from 1944, in 1949–1955 an employee of the Federal Trade Commission

⁷ Claude Denson Pepper (1900–1989), a longtime lawyer in important government administrations; in 1936–1951, a Florida senator and several times the chairman of the Florida delegation to the Democratic National Convention (including in 1948), in 1963–1989, a member of the House of Representatives; one of the most active liberals in Congress; after World War II, his conciliatory attitude toward the Soviet Union provoked opposition even within his own party.

⁸ Henry Agard Wallace (1888–1965), in 1910–1933 a publisher of agricultural press; initially an activist in the Republican Party and in 1933–1940 the secretary of agriculture in the cabinet of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; after changing his political affiliation to the Democratic Party, in 1941–1945 he was the vice president of the United States, then in 1945–1946 the secretary of commerce. After a split in the Democratic Party before of the 1948 presidential election, the liberal faction nominated him as its presidential candidate against the candidacy of the incumbent President Harry S. Truman, supported by most party members.

Jeśli nie chcesz, aby Moskal
W swej niewoli kiedyś miał cię,
Wciąż pamiętaj o Pearl Harbor,
Lecz pamiętaj też o Jałcie.

Pomnij, Rosję kto wychwalał,
Na Polaków kto się zżywał
I kto wszystko obiecywał,
A niczego nie dotrzymał.

Stalin z nas się w kułak śmieje.
My do niego zaś wytwornie.
„Dali” mówi „Lwów i Wilno,
Może dadzą Kalifornię”.

I podgryza nas tu w kraju,

I szpieguje, ile wlezie,
A to wszystko za dolary,
Cośmy dali mu w „*land-lease*”.

Kto chce Meada, ten popiera
I Wallace’a i Peppera.
A to znaczy, niech Bóg strzeże,
Stalin przyjdzie po Peppera.

Jeśli nie chcesz, by dobrobyt
I twą wolność diabli wzięli,
Głosuj na tych, którzy wszystko,
Co dziś mamy, przewidzieli.

Wołaj głośno: Precz z Stalinem!
Polska musi znów być wolna!
Głosuj na tych, którzy kiedyś
Głosowali na Lincolna.

If you don't want the Muscovite
To enslave you one day,
Don't forget about Pearl Harbor
But also remember Yalta.

Remember who praised Russia
And criticized the Poles,
And who promised everything
And kept none of his promises.

Stalin is laughing at us
And we treat him like gentlemen.
“They gave me Lviv and Vilnius,” he
says,
“Perhaps they'll give me California.”

And he undermines us here in our
country,
And he spies on us a lot,
And all of that he does for the dollars
That we gave him as “*land-lease*.”

Those who vote for Mead
Support both Wallace and Pepper.
And this means, God forbid,
That Stalin will follow Pepper.

If you don't want prosperity
And your freedom to go to hell,
Vote for those who have foreseen
Everything that is happening today.

Scream out loud: Down with Stalin!
Poland must be free again!
Vote for those who once
Voted for Lincoln.

Czy chcesz wiedzieć, co rząd da ci,

Gdyby wreszcie demokraci
Nie odeszli sobie w cień?
Ani mięsa, ani chleba
I niczego, co ci trzeba,
Lecz *RED PEPPER* cały dzień.
Mięsa nie ma, z cukrem bida,
Ciągłe strajki, nędzny byt.
Narodowi nie trza Meada,
Lecz potrzebny mu jest *meat*.*

Do you want to know what the
government
will give you

If the Democrats don't
Finally lose power?
Neither meat nor bread,
Nor anything you need,
But instead *RED PEPPER* all day.
There is no meat, sugar is hard to get,
Constant strikes, poor subsistence.
The nation does not need Mead,
What it needs is meat.

Today it is difficult to assess to what extent the opinions of this firm believer in conservative values (as Lechoń should be called, given the American Republicans *versus* Democrats duopoly) about representatives of the opposing political camp were accurate and correct. Apparently, this “agitprop” was addressed primarily to members of the old Polish American community (which originated from the “economic” emigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), which worked hard to achieve its relative financial prosperity in the United States, as it uses economic arguments that they understood very well, while the reference to the American defeat at Pearl Harbor intentionally takes advantage of the desire, common in this ethnic group, to identify with the new homeland, which could not be ignored in view of its significant electoral power at the time. It is to the post-World War II pro-independence émigré community (which to this day emphasizes its separateness from the Polish American community) that the phrases about Poland’s betrayal by the Allies in Yalta and the loss of Lviv and Vilnius are addressed: these arguments were intended to convince those who did not want or could not return after the war to

* Verbatim translation. The poem was first printed in the article: B. Dorosz, “Archiwum Jana Lechońa w Polskim Instytucie Naukowym w Nowym Jorku. Relacja z badań” [Jan Lechoń’s Archive in the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in New York. An account from the research], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1999, book 3.

Poland ruled according to the post-Yalta order, or who had no place to return to, because their native lands – the Eastern Borderland – were outside the post-war Polish borders. However, with regard to the poetics of this piece, one cannot help but notice the elements of semantic word play used by the author and the appropriately chosen rhymes: *red pepper* and Democrat Pepper, as well as Mead and *meat*. However, it is a very modest piece of political satire if one compares it with Lechoń's pre-war output in this area, such as "Szopki polityczne" [Political Nativity plays] staged at the literary cafe "Pod Pikadorem" [Under the Picador] or published in *Cyrulik Warszawski* magazine.⁹ Critics of the time valued him for his accurately directed blade of merciless satire, while the poet, who socialized with politicians, believed that he had the knowledge and skills which he sometimes claimed his co-authors did not have ("all this very much lacks political orientation")¹⁰ and justified his own passion and spitefulness by saying: "I have the venom of hell on the tip of my nib and I don't know any limits when I am outraged by something."¹¹

Other ephemeral poems Lechoń wrote abroad are definitely different in character – they have quite a private dimension. Described as "friendship book" poems, they primarily provoke questions about their addressees or the circumstances of their creation in connection with selected figures – not necessarily widely known (which the dictionary definition requires). However, this is not an easy or obvious task.

My "American capture" included a unique print titled *Polish Village Paradox, N.Y. Polskie letnisko i uzdrowisko w górach Adirondacks* [Polish summer resort and spa in the Adirondacks mountains].¹² It is a rather large and

⁹ See: M. Hemar, J. Lechoń, A. Słonimski, J. Tuwim, *Szopki Pikadora i Cyrulika Warszawskiego 1922–1931* [Pikador's and Cyrulik Warszawski's satirical Nativity plays 1922–1931], ed. T. Januszewski, Warsaw 2013, 433 pages.

¹⁰ J. Lechoń, *Listy do Anny Jackowskiej* [Letters to Anna Jackowska] (a letter dated February 23, 1930), op. cit., p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibidem* [a letter of March 13, 1926], p. 41.

¹² A print in the possession of the author, donated to her by the daughter of the owner of Paradox, Barbara née Gieysztor, married names Krzywicka and Świdarska; the quotations are from that folder.

richly illustrated advertising folder in Polish with local photographs, intended to convince émigrés looking for a place for a summer holiday that a

Pole longing for the Homeland will find perhaps the most familiar landscape in the Adirondacks mountains. [...]

– “I could swear,” said one of last year’s visitors, “that I had left America for Poland for those two weeks.” – “Naturally,” we replied in such cases. – “Paradox” is Poland. Maybe someday we will join the United States as the 49th state, but for now it’s Poland.” – To demonstrate it, this year we put up a boom gate with a White Eagle at the boundary of Paradox and changed the clumsy name of the guesthouse from “Paradox House” to “Polish Village.”

The brochure opens with *Wyjątki z Księgi Gości Paradoxu* [Exceptions from the Paradox Guestbook], with a poem by Lechoń as the first entry:

Wciąż o Polsce tu się marzy,
Serce, wzrok i słuch zachwyca;
To Augustów, to Krynica!
Co za kuchnia gospodarzy!
Každy mówi: „Znów za rok się
Zobaczymy w Paradoxie!”¹³

We still dream about Poland here,
To the heart’s, the eyes’, and the ears’
delight;
It’s Augustów, it’s Krynica!
And the hosts’ outstanding cuisine!
Everyone says: “In one year,
We will see each other at Paradox!”

It is most likely that this piece – rather unsophisticated in form and, as one can assume, scribbled rather “hastily,” was written in 1945, since Lechoń wrote to Mieczysław Grydzewski in the autumn of that year: “Paradox is Gieysztor’s property that he has just acquired – a wonder in the mountains by lakes. In the summer, it was a boarding house with a very Polish messy and charming style,”¹⁴ since a large number of Polish visitors were drawn here, including Maria Modzelewska, Halina and Ignacy

¹³ Verbatim translation. The poem first appeared in print in an edition of J. Lechoń, K. Wierzyński, *Listy 1941–1956* [Letters 1941–1956], ed. B. Dorosz in collaboration with P. Kądziała, Warsaw 2016, p. 84.

¹⁴ M. Grydzewski, J. Lechoń, *Listy 1923–1956* [Letters 1923–1956], from the autograph for the print, prepared, introduction, and footnotes by B. Dorosz, vol. 1–2, Warsaw 2006, vol. 1, p. 136.

Matuszewski, Stefania and Zygmunt Klingsland, and Halina and Kazimierz Wierzyński, who wrote to Jan Lechoń, a friend of them both, specifically from “Paradox” in a letter dated August 17, 1946: “The fond memory of you continues here inviolably.”¹⁵

In her book of memoirs, Irena Lorentowicz, a regular of that guest-house, devoted to it a separate chapter titled “Jezioro Paradoxs” [Lake Paradox], showing the unusual charms of that place and outlining an interesting profile of Władysław Gieysztor, its owner:

a noble man like no other, an extraordinary man, living in a world of his own imaginations, abusing trust right and left, and yet a wizard like no other, whose fantasies were hard to resist. [...] One of his most interesting feats was the creation of a Polish settlement, a “Polish village.” [...] His whole farm on Lake Paradox was a great paradox, [...] but he was able to evoke a mood of Polishness, probably by the power of some magic. In the main house [...] there was an album of old photographs on the table, which Lechoń flipped through thoughtfully.¹⁶

His classical short biographical footnote might read as follows: Władysław Gieysztor (1892–1960), an economist; before the war, among other things, the head of the legal department at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, from 1920 to 1930 the editor-in-chief of the weekly *Przemysł i Handel*, from 1930 the editor of the magazines *Polska Gospodarcza* and *The Polish Economist*; distinguished for his contribution to the construction of the port and city of Gdynia. Since the war he has lived in the United States, where, among other things, he ran the company “Art Church Interiors”; after 1956 he returned to Poland.

However, it is impossible to ignore Irena Lorentowicz’s other information that Gieysztor “heroically crossed borders several times as a Polish emissary at the beginning of the war, and briefly visited Paris.” More information on this intriguing and, in the historical context, not at all insignificant issue can be found in other memoirs, from which it appears that this “magician or illusionist” (Lorentowicz’s terms), after the outbreak of

¹⁵ J. Lechoń, K. Wierzyński, *Listy 1941–1956* [Letters 1941–1956], op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ I. Lorentowicz, *Oczarowania* [Enchantments], Warsaw 1972, pp. 249–254.

World War II and the happy relocation of his family to Nice, volunteered in December 1939

to be an emissary (alias “Hoffman”) to the emerging underground authorities in Poland. After obtaining appropriate instructions from the highest Polish authorities in Angers and Paris, he went to Hungary, from where he and his friend Jerzy Michalewski (alias “Dokładny”), equipped with adequate mail and money for work in Poland, were flown on a well-trodden courier route across the border to Warsaw.¹⁷

However, it turns out that this secret expedition was also to bear fruit abroad, in the circle of the forming government in exile, because

among the numerous written and oral reports that Władysław Gieysztor carried with him, [...] there was a statement by representatives of the People’s Party in Poland stating that they did not consider Professor Kot to be the party’s official representative and that they wanted to warn the government in Paris and Angers about him.

At that moment, Kot openly declared a war against Gieysztor along the lines of “I will destroy you.” This crowned Władysław Gieysztor’s extremely sacrificial mission from Paris to Poland in January 1940.¹⁸

This expedition was the topic of an article by the later owner of *Paradox* on the political underground in Poland entitled “U Arciszewskiego w Warszawie” [At Arciszewski’s home in Warsaw],¹⁹ published in *Tygodnik Polski* edited by Lechoń in New York.

It is worth adding that before their fascination with *Paradox*, Gieysztor and Lechoń were united by at least a dislike of Minister Stanisław Kot, to whom the poet “owed” the revocation at the end of 1943 of government subsidies for the publication of *Tygodnik*, considered by the Minister of Information and Documentation to be a magazine that “did not fulfill the hopes placed in it,” when in fact the problem was its political line, since

¹⁷ T. Pawłowicz, *Obraz pokolenia* [Image of a generation], Cracow 1999, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹⁹ W. Gieysztor, “U Arciszewskiego w Warszawie” [At Arciszewski’s home in Warsaw], *Tygodnik Polski*, New York 1944, no. 49.

the journalists criticized the government's foreign policy, judging it to be too conciliatory, and particularly concessionary toward the Soviet Union.

Gieysztor also wrote a number of articles published in *Tygodnik*: an analytical article titled "Gdzie będą Sowiety po wojnie?" [Where will the Soviets be after the war?]²⁰ on a topic related to both politics and economics, which should not be surprising to anyone since Gieysztor was formerly an active economic activist and editor of economic journals; an article titled "Niemiecki Katyń" [German Katyń]²¹ about the murder of the defenders of that city, which should come as no surprise since he was a resident of the Kamienna Góra district of Gdynia; and a text the author's expressing concern, titled "Czy naprawdę młodzież polska w Ameryce jest stracona dla Polski?" [Are the Polish youth in America really lost to Poland?]²² and delineating "Wielkie zadanie" [The great task]²³ which, according to the author, was the need to bring Poles from camps liberated in Europe to the United States, which could be expected from a "social activist" interested in the problems of the émigré community. What may surprise, however, is Gieysztor's few short stories,²⁴ the reportage text on travels in America,²⁵ and, most importantly, the book (novel?) announced by *Tygodnik* as being prepared for publication under the telling title *Rozbitki* [Castaways].²⁶

²⁰ W. Gieysztor, "Gdzie będą Sowiety po wojnie?" [Where will the Soviets be after the war?], *Tygodnik Polski* 1944, no. 25.

²¹ W. Gieysztor, "Niemiecki Katyń" [German Katyń], *Tygodnik Polski* 1945, no. 6.

²² W. Gieysztor, "Czy naprawdę młodzież polska w Ameryce jest stracona dla Polski?" [Are the Polish youth in America really lost to Poland?], *Tygodnik Polski* 1943, no. 48.

²³ W. Gieysztor, "Wielkie zadanie" [The great task], *Tygodnik Polski* 1945, no. 23.

²⁴ W. Gieysztor, "Stary proboszcz" [Old parish priest], *Tygodnik Polski* 1943, no. 20; "Stasiek i Franek" [Stasiek and Franek], *ibidem* 1943, no. 22; "Szare dni wygnañcze" [Gray days in exile], *ibidem* 1944, no. 11; "Walentowa" [Walenty's wife], *ibidem* 1944, no. 18.

²⁵ W. Gieysztor, "Na Majnach (u litewskich i polskich górników w Pensylwanii)" [In Majny (with Lithuanian and Polish miners in Pennsylvania)], *Tygodnik Polski* 1943, no. 13; "Na preriach w «Nieboracze»" [In the prairies in the "Nieboraczka" (poor woman)], *ibidem* 1944, no. 1, about Poles in Nebraska.

²⁶ W. Gieysztor, "Tragedia emigracji (z niewykończonej książki pt. «Rozbitki»)»" [The tragedy of emigration (from the unfinished book titled "Castaways")], *Tygodnik Polski* 1944, no. 44; "Rozmowa przy kominku (z przygotowanej do druku książki pt. «Rozbitki»)»" [A conversation at a fireplace (from the book titled "Castaways" prepared for print)], *ibidem* 1945, no. 14.

However, Lechoń did not express a good opinion about the businessman involved in various activities either in his correspondence with friends – in a letter to Wierzyński he wrote about him as “crazy Gieysztor”²⁷ – or in *Dziennik* [Diary] in which he noted on December 26, 1949, after returning from Washington:

I arrived at night so that in the morning I could go to Long Island to attend Jerzy Krzywicki's wedding as the best man. [...] But since nothing that Krzywicki's father-in-law, Gieysztor, was involved in was ever done properly, the car that was supposed to take me there didn't come, and as a result I didn't go [...].²⁸

“The Lord of Paradox” (as Irena Lorentowicz called him) apparently aroused in the poet quite different emotions than Paradox itself.

The opposite is true of two other persons gifted by him with poems written especially for them, which I found completely by accident in 2000 in the Houghton Library at the Harvard University (the main reason for my visit there at the time was to look for Lechoń's letters to Grydzewski, which had been considered lost). Lechoń's archive materials there turned out to be surprisingly abundant; in a collection of his correspondence and among the books with his dedications, I came across two small, sentimental and lyrical poems, which the poet himself surely soon forgot about, although he attested to the creation of one of them in his *Dziennik* [Diary] on January 2, 1953: “I wrote two stanzas of a ‘madrigal’ for Cecilia Burr with thanks for a very timely new year gift. I swear that this poem is almost literature.”²⁹

“Ephemeral literature” – in the most literal sense – because this poetic piece was also written on a traditional (in a truly American taste and artistic style) Christmas greeting card, and it was only because of a lucky coincidence that when the holiday mood subsided, it was not thrown into the trash bin along with many other greeting cards received.

²⁷ J. Lechoń, K. Wierzyński, *Listy 1941–1956* [Letters 1941–1956], op. cit., p. 85.

²⁸ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], ed. R. Loth, vol. 1–3, Warsaw 1992–1993, vol. 1, pp. 162–163.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 6.

Mościa Kasztelanowo	Your Majesty Castellan's Wife!
Dzięki za dar hojny,	Thank you for the generous gift,
Którego cenę zwiększa, że z tak	Which is even more valuable because
pięknej ręki.	it was given
Chciałbym być Kochanowskim, by	by such a
opiewać	beautiful
wdzięki	hand.
Osoby tak uroczej, chociaż tak	I'd like to be Kochanowski to praise
dostojnej.	the charms
	Of a person so adorable, although so
	dignified.
Wpśród blasków światowych rzuć	Amidst the world's glare, take a look
czasem	sometimes
oczyma	At the card whose modesty
Na kartkę, której skromność mnie	embarrasses
samego	me,
wstydzi,	But amongst Your worshippers, may
Lecz wśród Twych wielbicieli, sam Pan	the Lord be
Bóg to widzi,	my witness,
Na pewno są możniejsi, wierniejszego	Some are certainly more powerful, but
nie ma.	none is more
	faithful than I.
Cesi na Nowy Rok 1953	To Cesia for the New Year of 1953
Leszek	

Why a “madrigal”? The answer – somewhat perverse – is to be found in the peculiarities of that poetic genre; it was usually “a short work on love, containing an elaborate and wittily exaggerated compliment, addressed to the lady of the heart,” and in past centuries was the most characteristic form of court poetry.³⁰ Who, then, was the lady gifted with such an artful piece?

³⁰ M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of literary terms], op. cit., p. 291.

Mrs. Cecylia Burr, née Wasilowska (1886–1964), born in Poland, had already appeared in Lechoń's émigré life as the widow of an American millionaire, George Howard Burr.³¹

She was remembered by the Polish community in New York as a patroness of the poet; among other things, in February 1948, she not only chaired the Organizing Committee of Jan Lechoń's Jubilee Evening, but sent out an elegant decorative prints with information about the event, encouraging donations to the poet:

Our Great Poet Jan Lechoń's circle of friends, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his literary work, would like to give him a Jubilee Gift, which would be of help to him in his further literary work for the Polish Nation. Please contribute to this action through Mrs. George H. Burr, The Towers The Waldorff-Astoria,³²

she herself, on the other hand made a generous donation “for J. Lechoń benefis” in the amount of one thousand dollars, and later collected checks sent in by others. During the festivities, she and her *dame de compagnie*, Janina Higersberger-Kulikowska (called Żancia by her friends, who will be discussed further on) were engaged in selling the poet's works. Similarly, in April 1955, she co-organized and generously supported the “Evening of Jan Lechoń,” for which the publication of his *Poezje zebrane 1916–1953* [Collected poems 1916–1953] in London in 1954 proved to be the perfect pretext.

She gifted her friend with valuable and charming trinkets, which Lechoń eagerly noted in his *Dziennik* [Diary], reporting, among other things, on the course of his name day in March 1954:

Cesia Burr brought me an English *argent repoussé* dating back to the end of the 17th century, a marvelous mug – a gift that not only enriched and beautified

³¹ George Howard Burr (1866–1939) was a banker and a stockbroker, served as the commissioner of the American Red Cross in Paris during World War I, and became an officer in the French Legion of Honor; Cecilia was his second wife from 1925.

³² A print from the archives of B. Dorosz.

my room, but with which also the donor looked pretty, like in a beautiful and costly, but discreet dress.³³

She also provided him with financial assistance multiple times, competing in this regard with another generous sponsor of the poet, Irena Cittadini (who was a patron of many Polish artists, including Karol Szymanowski); in the *Dziennik* [Diary], one can find the following note: “Irena Cittadini to Cecilia Burr, advising her against saving money: ‘What the heck? Do you want to be the richest woman in the cemetery?’”³⁴

Lechoń’s friends, aware of his constant financial problems on the one hand and of his peculiar dependence on the patron on the other, had different advice for him. Doctor “Jachimowicz advises marriage to Mrs. Burr,” Lechoń wrote to Wierzyński,³⁵ who was irritated: “I read about the thousand dollars from Mrs. Burr for *Kultura*”,³⁶ I don’t remember whether *Tygodnik* has ever earned so much favor in her eyes and pocket. Shit on that lady, I implore you!”³⁷ at other times he called her “the Duchess of Mentecaptus locked in a tower,”³⁸ an allusion to her residence in Manhattan in permanent suites at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel (with its distinctive two towers).

Lechoń was a fairly frequent guest in these apartments. It is to such a visit that we owe one of his late poems. First, a note appeared in his *Dziennik* [Diary] on December 25, 1954:

³³ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary] (a note of March 20, 1954), op. cit., vol. 3, p. 331.

³⁴ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary] (a note of July 15, 1952), op. cit., vol. 2, p. 489.

³⁵ A letter from J. Lechoń to K. Wierzyński dated December 6, 1950, in: J. Lechoń, K. Wierzyński, *Listy 1941–1956* [Letters 1941–1956], op. cit., p. 396. – Jan Jachimowicz (1902–1989?), a physician. After graduating from the Jagiellonian University, he did his specialized training at clinics in Paris, Berlin, London, and New York, and later served as a head of internal medicine wards in Warsaw hospitals. He was a member many national and international medical societies. In exile in New York, he continued his medical practice (among other things, he was Lechoń’s regular physician).

³⁶ A donation from the Polish-American sponsor made it possible to publish the May (5th) issue of *Kultura* in 1950, which was confirmed on the front page with the following information: “Issue dedicated to Mrs. Cecilia Burr, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York.”

³⁷ A letter from K. Wierzyński to J. Lechoń dated February 18 or 25, 1950, in: J. Lechoń, K. Wierzyński, *Listy 1941–1956* [Letters 1941–1956], op. cit., p. 213.

³⁸ A letter from K. Wierzyński to J. Lechoń dated February 10, 1955, *ibidem*, p. 527.

Yesterday, as I was walking to Cecilia Burr's place for a Christmas Eve dinner, Faulkner, tiny, in some sort of winter coat, wearing a somewhat comical brown quasi-Tyrolean hat, looking like some sort of Polish nobleman lost in New York, walked right in front of me into the "Waldorf" and when, still looking back at him, I walked to the elevator, I heard him say to the doorman: "Mr. Stein, please," and after a while: "I am Faulkner." Among the gentlemen in tailcoats and ladies in mink furs and diamonds, no one recognized him, he looked in that hall almost like some character from Hoffmann's works; like a ghost from another world. I felt very silly that I was dressed for the evening, even though I am a poor man, while Faulkner is a celebrity and a rich man. I thought to myself how much I had lost because of the thousands of evenings I had spent in my life wearing a tuxedo or a tailcoat, and I was about to accost Faulkner and tell him something that Warsaw drunks used to say, crying in "Astoria" or "Adria" over their misery in the vests of various important Polish figures.³⁹

Later, in the diary notes from October 30, 1955 until May 6, 1956, there are occasional sparse references to writing a poem *Faulkner*; eventually, this poignant piece was titled *Wiersz do Williama Faulknera spotkanego w hotelu Waldorf-Astoria* [A poem to William Faulkner met at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel].⁴⁰

Cecilia Burr was devoted to Polish affairs in various ways, including organizing meetings of American and Polish politicians in her home, which were also attended by the keenly interested poet and other representatives of the science and art community; these included a breakfast she gave at her residence in the Locust Valley on the Long Island in honor of Gen. Władysław Anders during his tour of the United States in the autumn of 1950.⁴¹

³⁹ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], op. cit., vol. 3, p. 531.

⁴⁰ J. Lechoń, *Poezje* [Poems], op. cit., pp. 199–200. The editor, Roman Loth, annotated this piece with the following text: "It seems to have remained in an incompletely final shape. Not printed during the poet's lifetime, it was published from the posthumous papers of Michał Sprusiński in *Polityka* in 1981, no. 24 (June 13)." Let us recall that Michał Sprusiński was one of the first researchers from Poland, who in 1978 (thanks to a grant from the Kościuszko Foundation) had the opportunity to search through Jan Lechoń's archive kept at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, based in New York.

⁴¹ As an aside, as a sort of "occasional curiosity," it can be added that in the spring of 1951 Cecilia Burr, during her visit to London, became the godmother of General Anders'

However, this lady engaged in public affairs also needed Lechoń. As the editor of *Tygodnik Polski*, he promoted in its pages the activities of the Association of Soldiers' Mothers, established in 1944, of which Mrs. Burr was the president. He supported her substantively in creating a series of patriotic and artistic events known as "Polish Evenings" in late 1947 and early 1948 (and wrote inaugural speeches and addresses for her).⁴²

The poet also became part of his sponsor's private life. Among other things, he attended the engagement of her granddaughter, Cecile Parker, and later the wedding and reception at the exclusive Hotel Plaza in Manhattan,⁴³ where he experienced the lifestyle of the American *high society*, which made quite a strong impression on the poet, who was always sensitive to all snobbery and so-called worldliness.

Paradoxically, emotionally fragile himself, he was able to provide important support to her in the role of a compassionate and understanding friend. When her daughter, Mary Parker, died in July 1950, "Mrs. Burr said [...] to Żancia Higersberger: 'Call Leszek and tell him what happened to me,'"⁴⁴ as a result of which she received a poignant letter from the poet, in which he wrote, among other things:

daughter. This news appeared in a letter from Kazimierz Wierzyński to Mieczysław Grydzewski dated March 1, 1951; the poet, wanting the editor to get a wealthy sponsor for *Wiadomości*, tried to get his friend to contact her at the time, and wrote: "Mrs. Burrow is going to London in the middle of the month. Apparently Anders 'invited her' to be his daughter's godmother" (M. Grydzewski, K. and H. Wierzyński, *Listy* [Letters], ed. B. Dorosz with the collaboration of P. Kądziała, Warsaw 2022, vol. 2: 1948–1952, pp. 468–469). Anna Maria Anders (born in 1950) confirmed the fact that her godmother was Cecylia Burr (in an interview with the author of these words on October 19, 2018 in London, during the inauguration of the academic year of the Polish University Abroad) and added that it was in honor of her godmother that she was given the third name of Cecylia at her baptism, although she never met Cecylia Burr later in person.

⁴² For more information on this topic, see: B. Dorosz, *Nowojorski pasjans. Polski Instytut Naukowy w Ameryce, Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński. Studia o wybranych zagadnieniach działalności 1939–1969* [New York solitaire. Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński. Studies on selected problems of activity 1939–1969], Warsaw 2013, pp. 226–230.

⁴³ See: J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary] (respectively: notes of January 14 and March 10, 1951), op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 18 and 69.

⁴⁴ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary] (a note of July 6, 1950), op. cit., vol. 1, p. 341.

Dear Cecilia,

I am kissing your hands in the tenderest desire that you experience solace and comfort in your grief as soon as possible. I know from my life that we only know how to survive parting forever with those we love to and agree again with life, if we believe firmly in their presence beside us.

When my father died and I went to his funeral in Warsaw, I had to turn on the light in my room at night, because I felt that my father was beside me, not as a phantom of a living person, but as that which is immortal in us, as a spirit that came to tell me that I would henceforth always have an advocate and protector in him high up there.

Believing in God, I also believe, as the ancient Greeks – who foreboded it – believed, in that Platonic world where everything that rises above matter and earthly desires lasts forever: everything that is good, beautiful, and sacrificial.

With what you did for your daughter, what you do for others, you connect with the world, connect with Her, and there is no separation between You two. My dear Cecilia! This is no platitude, it is a deep belief that once allowed me to feel at the funeral of my loved ones unearthly serenity and accept the fate.⁴⁵

However, most importantly, Cecilia Burr's home in New York's suburbs (in a small snobbish town where the inscriptions on the store windows are still in French) was a quiet refuge for Lechoń in periods of his mental exhaustion and a place to escape from the hustle and heat of Manhattan; on July 28, 1951 in his *Dziennik* [Diary], he wrote: "I went to Locust Valley, to Cecylia. I fled the city because I had new annoyances and could no longer stand staying in the room where I had been experiencing the same anguish over and over again for a year."⁴⁶ He also found there an illusory sense of connection with the irretrievably lost homeland and an emotionally felt Polishness; therefore, the *Dziennik* [Diary] is thus full of notes such as this one: "Cecilia's Park... Flower beds after the dew smelled the same as in Poland" (August 27, 1950);⁴⁷ "It is an evening in the Locust Valley. I knew, coming here, how tired I was. [...] On the way to Cecilia, a forest of young birch trees... What a jaunty, brisk and so Polish poetry it is, as if these birch-

⁴⁵ A manuscript in J. Lechoń's archive at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, ref: Jan Lechoń Paper, collection 005, folder 3.

⁴⁶ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], op. cit., vol. 2, p. 197.

⁴⁷ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], op. cit., vol. 1, p. 389.

es were nowhere else” (June 30, 1951);⁴⁸ “The golf courses near Cecylia’s house resemble Polish mowed meadows...” (July 7, 1953).⁴⁹

Such nostalgic memories of Poland, and primarily of Warsaw, dictated to Lechoń another mini-poem inscribed in the form of a dedication in his only rhymed story for children⁵⁰ that he gave to Janina Higersberger-Kulikowska – this poetry is indeed ephemeral, for it could only be known to a very small group of possible future readers from the circle of her friends and acquaintances.

April 21, 1948

Noc zapada, droga Żanciu,
Gwiazd ciągnąca srebrną wstążkę.
Z pół godziny już się głowie,
Jak podpisać Ci tę książkę,
By przez chwilę zaszumiło
Dobrych wspomnień trenem ślicznym,
Aby bzem Ci zapachniało
(Tym, w Ogrodzie Botanicznym).
Żeby było to, co pragniesz,
Co najbardziej Żancia lubi.
Chciałbym z serca. Lecz wiadomo,

Że nas właśnie serce gubi.
Więc gdy pragniesz, aby dowcip
Jak szampański korek strzelił,
Aby wiersz Ci się roześmiał,
Aby rym się rozweselił,
Nagle tęskność Cię ogarnia
Jak na naszą polską wiosnę.
Nagle rymy Ci się płączą

The night is falling, dear Żancia,
Pulling a silver ribbon of stars.
I’ve been thinking for half an hour now,
What to write in this book for you,
To make some rustle for a while
With a lovely train of good memories,
To bring the scents of a lilac
(The one in the Botanical Garden).
So it is the way you want it,
What Żancia likes best.
I would like it from the heart. But you
know

That the heart causes us to lose.
So when you want a joke
To shoot like a champagne cork,
To make your poem laugh,
To make the rhyme cheer up,
Suddenly longing engulfs you
Like during our Polish spring.
Suddenly your rhymes are tangled

⁴⁸ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 171–172.

⁴⁹ J. Lechoń, *Dziennik* [Diary], op. cit., vol. 3, p. 159.

⁵⁰ J. Lechoń, *Historia o jednym chłopczyku i o jednym lotniku* [The story of one boy and one aviator], London 1946, 33 pages.

I już prawie są miłosne.

Wzrok mój goni po Warszawie
Pełną szyku żywą lalkę
I spojrzeniem rozmarzonym
Chce jej zajrzeć pod woalkę.
Chciałbym iść z nią przez ulice,

Których nie ma i nie będzie.
I coś szeptać jej jak student,

Jak w Warszawie, jak w legendzie.
Droga Żanciu! Widzisz sama,
Że do strasznych idzie rzeczy.
Wiersz mój wzdycha już wyraźnie,
Lada chwila się rozbeczy.
Więc ociera łzę niemęską,
Aż się z wstydu zarumienia.

Oto wierszyk mój dla Żanci
Zamiast kwiatów od „Złocienia”.*

And they're almost like in a love
poem.

My eyes follow around Warsaw
An elegant living doll
And with a dreamy gaze
Wants to look under her veil.
I would like to walk with her in the
streets,
That are not there and never will be.
And whisper something to her like
a student,

Like in Warsaw, like in a legend.
Dear Żancia! You can see for yourself,
That terrible things will happen.
My poem is already sighing distinctly,
It will start crying any minute.
So it's wiping away an unmanly tear,
It even blushes with shame.

Here is my poem for Żancia
Instead of flowers from “Złocienień.”

For a long time during my research on the Polish community in New York, Janina Hibernberger-Kulikowska, called Żancia, seemed to me to be simply a *dame de compagnie* of the mighty Mrs. Burr. In correspondence with Lechoń, in official actions for the benefit of the poet, and in his *Dziennik* [Diary], they always appear together: Cesia (or Cecyleczka) and Żancia.

In spite of all the obvious merits of the wealthy millionaire, whose noble will or grandiose whim was to assist the perpetually troubled poet,

* Verbatim translation. The flower shop “Złocienień” in Warsaw at 12 Mazowiecka Street, on the other side of the gate of the building that housed the “Mała Ziemiańska” patisserie, iconic for the Skamandrites, where they had their legendary table on the mezzanine floor.

it was this modest Żancia, always present beside or in the shadow of her patroness, who was often the final authority, or perhaps rather the advocate to whom Lechoń resorted in order to gain approval for his ideas or understanding of his needs from Cecylia Burr. For the poet, she was also a warm, nostalgic memory of the forever lost Warsaw, as evidenced by another dedication to her on a copy of *Aut Caesar aut nihil* (in a 1955 bibliophile London edition): “To Dear Żancia, who has been, is, and always will be for me the most perfect embodiment of Warsaw’s elegance. Devoted friend Jan Lechoń. New York 1955.”

In my early works related to Lechoń, in biographical footnotes about Janina a.k.a. Żancia, I wrote: “more detailed biographical data is missing,” which any researcher would always consider a kind of failure. In time, it turned out that

was a person of great merit in the circles of the New York Polish community, active in many fields. She graduated from the University of Warsaw with a degree in law (1939). It arrived in the United States during World War II via Mexico. She was a long-time secretary at the Kościuszko Foundation (she was in charge of student and academic exchanges with Poland, as well as scholarship and grant matters; she is particularly credited with providing assistance to Józef Mackiewicz). She was a member of the governing body of the Polish Law Society in the United States of America. She generously supported the Mianowski Fund (in 1995–2001, she donated about \$30,000), and her donations were used to establish the Drogomir (Kulikowski coat of arms) publishing fund. After her death, the Mianowski Fund received more than \$100,000 from her estate. She was one of the lifetime members of the Józef Piłsudski Institute in America, and in the 1980s she was secretary of its Board. She was a member of the jury of the literary award of the Society for the Propagation of Hope. She occasionally wrote about art (including the paintings of Tadeusz Styka).⁵¹ She died in September 2006.⁵²

⁵¹ J. Hibersberger, “The brilliant art of Tade Styka,” *The Polish Review*, New York 1945, no. 5.

⁵² J. Zieliński, “Retrospektywna kartomancja” [Retrospective cartomancy], *Pamiętnik Literacki*, London 2013, vol. 45–46 (review: B. Dorosz, *Nowojorski pasjans* [New York solitaire], Warsaw 2013).

She probably died in Warsaw, which she and the poet loved so much... Being aware that the collections of correspondence, including with Cesia and Żancia, preserved in Lechoń's archive at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, which are important for the poet's New York biography, are not complete, I tried to look for some of the missing links. Unfortunately, Cecilia Burr's granddaughter, Mrs. Cecile Parker, whom I managed to contact in 1998, regretfully confessed that she did not know what happened to her grandmother's so-called papers, which were taken care of by a (then deceased) relative after her death. On the other hand, she became unusually aroused at the mention of Janina Higersberger, Żancia, whom she lost sight of years ago when her grandmother's life companion moved to Warsaw. She even gave me her phone number in Warsaw; however, no one picked up the phone when I called...

I note my impressions from reading "Lechoń's ephemeral poems" and the knowledge of the Polish émigré community in New York based on them⁵³ with the awareness that the events recalled here have already been covered by the patina of history, and the characters participating in them are slowly slipping into oblivion. However, I continue to be deeply convinced that even the most trivial-looking piece of a poem in the poet's output should not be ignored, because behind it there are people, issues, and events that were important and significant in his émigré life.

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⁵³ I previously wrote about the finding at the Harvard University of a "madrigal for Mrs. Burr" and a rhymed dedication to "Żancia" in a popular article titled *Lechonia wiersze ulotne* [Lechoń's ephemeral poems] in the pages of the New York-based *Przegląd Polski* (the *Weekly Literary and Social Supplement to Nowy Dziennik*) in 2001, in the June 8 issue, announced on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the poet's tragic death, which fell on that day. This article contains only some references to that publication.