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## Jan Lechoń's and Kazimierz Wierzyński's Letters (Some Comments Based on the Critical Edition)

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the problems faced by an editor preparing a correspondence dialogue between Jan Lechoń and Kazimierz Wierzyński (237 letters, mainly handwritten, from the years 1941-1956) for a critical edition, such as: its completeness, dating, or the challenge of deciphering the manuscripts. The paper signals some of the appearing motifs and problems in the letters, making an initial attempt to interpret them in the context of both authors' biographies, as well as historical events (especially the experience of emigration). Moreover, it contains seventeen short poetic pieces written by both poets (poems, epigrams and trifles) which may be found on the pages of those letters. They have been transcribed from the manuscripts and then edited, therefore appearing in print for the very first time in the Polish version of this article in 2011.

**Keywords:** Lechoń Jan, Wierzyński Kazimierz, epistolography – 20th century, editing, emigration – 20th century, ephemeral poetry, occasional poem

Names of title characters deeply inscribed themselves in the history of Polish literature of the twentieth century and are associated equally with the interwar period and emigration after World War II. The legend of Jan Lechoń (1899-1956) began with his great debut volume of poems *Karmazynowy poemat* [The Crimson Poem] (1920) and was also influenced by his diplomatic career as a cultural attaché to the Polish Embassy in Paris in the 1930s. Kazimierz Wierzyński (1894-1969) was the author of several excellent poetry volumes before the war, including *Olympic Laurel*, for which he was awarded the gold medal at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. It is worth remembering, however, that literary activity and, above all, friendship, were the aspects that united them constantly for 38 years – from approximately December 1918, that is from the earliest beginnings of the poets' coffee house "Pod Pikadorem,"<sup>1</sup> up to Lechoń's

<sup>1</sup> Wierzyński did not participate in the famous event, November 29, 1918, inaugurating the poets' coffee house "Pod Pikadorem" as its organiser, but he was there in the company

death by suicide in June 1956. Wierzyński and Lechoń took an active role in the mainstream literary and artistic life of the interwar period, shared connections with the intellectual and political elite of that time, and both lived through a dramatic war-enforced exodus from occupied Europe first to Brazil and subsequently to the United States. Add to that long years of exile in America, marked by personal dramas (concerning their private lives and literary work), and their tireless political and patriotic activity within the emigration movement: all these factors make the letters exchanged between these two close friends interesting not only to history or literature researchers, but also to the general public.

The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America (PIASA) in New York has curated Jan Lechoń's archive since 1957. (The private correspondence addressed to the poet at PIASA comprises a copious collection of letters. Those from Mieczysław Grydzewski<sup>2</sup> constitute the largest part, and those from Wierzyński are next in size). Wierzyński's wife, Halina, started an archive of his work, including his correspondence, in the 1970s at the Polish Library in London. At first, it seemed as if the entire epistolary exchange between these two poets could be reconstructed from these two archives, considering especially the extraordinary care that Halina Wierzyńska took to preserve even the tiniest details of her husband's life and writings, having acquired relevant information from even the remotest parts of the world (copies of his works, articles or press releases about him). However, a closer examination of both the London and New York resources paradoxically complicates the attempt to explain how these two archival collections were created (or rather – what has really been preserved from them until today), and despite the genuine care for the preservation of all letters, it clearly shows their incompleteness.

In the Polish Library in London there are various types of documents of interest to scholars:

1. original letters from Lechoń to Wierzyński (total number: 66);
2. three types of copies:
  - a) handwritten letters from Lechoń to Wierzyński, typewritten by Halina Wierzyńska (but their comparison with the originals shows that not all of them have been copied);
  - b) photocopies of Wierzyński's letters to Lechoń, sent from New York (total number: 68);

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of Wilam Horzyca as a spectator and a listener; he was introduced to the group of "pikadorians" a few days later by Julian Tuwim and on that evening Wierzyński performed on stage for the first time [see: K. Wierzyński, *Pamiętnik poety*, editing, introduction and footnotes P. Kądziała, first edition, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2018, pp. 90–94].

<sup>2</sup> Mieczysław Grydzewski (1894–1970), a historian and journalist; before World War II edited the literary monthly *Skamander* and weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* in Warsaw; from 1946 he continued editing and issuing the latter under the new title *Wiadomości* (published until 1981); the journal attracted Polish emigrants described as "stout-hearted and untouched" for their attitude against the post-Yalta political situation in Poland and in East-Central Europe.

c) handwritten letters from Wierzyński to Lechoń, typewritten by Halina Wierzyńska, whose originals are not at PIASA. Several questions arise here: how did Wierzyńska access them? What happened to them after they were typed out? Where are they now?

In New York, however, there are other original handwritten letters by Wierzyński to Lechoń (total number: 89); they are stored in various places – above all, in the Lechoń archive, in the collection of his correspondence as well as among other materials, but also in other archival collections: the PIASA possesses a relatively small collection of Wierzyński's works and letters. When Wierzyńska arranged the correspondence into a coherent dialogue,<sup>3</sup> for reasons so far unexplained not all of her husband's original letters to Lechoń were copied, and the selection seems random rather than following specific criteria.

The combination of the available London and New York materials creates a collection of 237 letters exchanged by Lechoń and Wierzyński between the years 1941-1956, with Lechoń authoring 67 (28% of the total), and Wierzyński 170 letters (72% of the total); this number also includes 10 undated postcards on which, in addition to the already printed Christmas and New Year's wishes, the poets wrote personal notes. The total volume (excluding the so-called editor's "apparatus") is about 375 pages. Interestingly, Lechoń's letters are fewer but average four to six pages each and therefore make up 33% of the page count. Wierzyński's letters constitute 67% of the total, because the vast majority of them are just a page long and sometimes quite laconic, such as postcards containing only a few words.

Even a cursory reading proves that the collection is incomplete, as in many places one may read that the letter is a response to an earlier mis-sive, which remains unknown because it is missing in archival collections; this applies to both authors, and is partially understandable in the case of Lechoń's archive (which, together with the entire Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences changed its Manhattan headquarters three times, and until the early 2000s was only partially organised), but it is of some surprise in the case of Wierzyński's archive (due to the aforementioned concern of his wife for securing his legacy).

In their originals, all letters were handwritten (except for one letter by Wierzyński dated November 4, 1953, which was typed, and three telegrams on postal forms). The typewritten copies of some of the letters, prepared by Wierzyńska, only seemingly facilitate the editor's task. Both poets' handwriting is difficult to decipher. Lechoń's "hieroglyphs" (Grydzewski's term

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<sup>3</sup> In the Polish Library in London one may find her correspondence from 1972 with Jan Librach, the then president of PIASA, in which the issue of copyright of Wierzyński's letters to Lechoń was considered: are they the property of the author or the addressee? – to which both correspondents, citing various customs and legal regulations in Europe and in the United States, took opposing views: according to Wierzyńska, the owner of the letters was the author, Wierzyński (and his heirs), according to Librach, it was the addressee, Lechoń.

for Lechoń's letters) have already been approached by other readers, with varying results.<sup>4</sup> Even Wierzyński, though well-practiced, clearly had problems with Lechoń's handwriting:

Dear Leszek, [...] I'm replying to you immediately for two reasons: 1. the letter is completely illegible so write back immediately, but please write clearly so that I can cherish every single word (letter of March 29, 1950).

It is absolutely necessary to read Lechoń's letters from the manuscripts and only then, if in doubt, confront them with the versions reproduced by Wierzyńska. But what to confront other typewritten copies of Wierzyński's letters with, if there are no originals?

Another problem of great significance is the issue of dating the letters, to which neither of the two poets attached much importance. The exact date is known only for 132 letters (55%), but the date is written down by the author only in 91 cases, and the remaining 41 are postmark dates on postcards or on a few preserved envelopes. On 56 letters the date has been expressed only partially, for example "Sunday 15 November," and in order to ascertain the year one needs to analyse the content of the letter and the calendar; there are 39 undated letters, but for 18 of them it has been possible to establish dates, at least approximately, the remaining 21, (on which no calendar information was placed, or words like "Tuesday" were written), required a deeper analysis and more extensive comparative work. Having Lechoń's letters and copies of her husband's letters from New York, Wierzyńska attempted to arrange them chronologically into a dialogue, which is why many of the letters bear notes handwritten by her, such as a year (sometimes with a question mark) or even the exact date (one may assume that this was done on the basis of a postmark from an envelope that, unfortunately, has not been preserved). However, both these pieces of information and the entire chronological system proposed by Wierzyńska was necessary to review and verify – all the more so because some other texts, which Wierzyńska did not have, should be included in this dialogue.

The correspondence between Wierzyński and Lechoń was of varying intensity: they were relatively frequent in 1948 (18 letters), when the Wierzyński family lived far away from New York, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. After Wierzyński moved to Sag Harbor (only about 100 km from New York), the need to exchange ideas via letters increased enormously and that despite the fact that Lechoń and Wierzyński both worked for Radio Free Europe and thus saw each other quite regularly in Manhattan. The letters, however, could not fully replace meetings, so Lechoń wrote:

<sup>4</sup> One may notice, for example, a misinterpretation of some of his words from *Dziennik* prepared for print from the manuscript by Stefania Sakowska and Juliusz Sakowski, or in some letters to Grydzewski published in the press by Edward Krasiński, before their critical edition was published [M. Grydzewski, J. Lechoń: *Listy 1923–1956*, edited from the manuscript by B. Dorosz, footnotes and introduction B. Dorosz, Vol. 1–2, Warszawa: Biblioteka "Więzi," 2006].

You have to go back to New York. You cannot always sit among fjords and wild geese, because you will turn into Ibsen. And I want you to be Sophocles and Euripides (letter of May 29, 1950).

The zenith of the friends' correspondence (77 letters in total) was the year 1950, which for Lechoń was a particularly dramatic time. The poet reported in letters to his friend all the stages of efforts made by himself and other people close to him (including Stefan Korboński),<sup>5</sup> to obtain permanent employment at the National Committee for Free Europe<sup>6</sup> – efforts which met with numerous obstacles. Wierzyński, for his part, not only provided reassuring words, as well as advice concerning what to do next, but he also initiated new actions, which lasted almost until the middle of 1951. It is horrifying how far would members of some of the Polish emigrant circles go to thwart Lechoń's efforts, resorting to various unethical methods (such as denunciations) and how eagerly and meticulously Americans scrutinized applicants for the job (for instance, we can find here confirmation of FBI agents' questioning about Lechoń not only Wierzyński, which was already known from various sources, but also a number of other people<sup>7</sup>). The following comment by Wierzyński highlights the Kafkaesque absurdity of this situation:

Let me reiterate that if I had not witnessed and partly participated in the Free Europe-Lechoń affair, I would not believe in its course or even existence (letter of May 7, 1951).

Numerous letters illustrate how this situation affected Lechoń's mental state. He confided in his friend with all honesty, seeking support and knowing that he would be understood. He wrote:

I feel terrible and my situation, objectively speaking, is terrible indeed. [...] To complete this image I can say that I am going through a *retour d'âge*<sup>8</sup> or some other shocks that make me feel less confident that I was managing my personal life the way my nature told me to. I am haunted by the thought that maybe you were right, urging me to do something

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Korboński (1901–1989), lawyer and peasant activist. Before World War II, he was a member of Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL). In 1941–45 member of the Directorate of Underground Resistance. After the war, he was the president of PSL. In danger of being arrested, he escaped to the USA in 1948. In exile he was an active pro-independence activist.

<sup>6</sup> In the Sikorski Museum in London, in the files of Jan Wszelaki (a diplomat, and wartime a counsellor of the Polish Embassy in Washington, as well as a diplomatic representative of the Polish government-in-exile in the US after 1945), one finds correspondence with Jan Ciechanowski (in the years 1941-1945 he was the ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Washington, remaining in exile), which illustrates these efforts, lasting nearly two years (from mid-1949 to spring 1951), from the formal-clerical as well as the American side [collection 39, portfolio 43: Candidacies of Poles to NCFE]; both diplomats were close friends of Lechoń's.

<sup>7</sup> See: H. Stephan, "Polish Émigré Writers in New York in the Files of the FBI: Lechoń, Wierzyński, Wittlin," *The Polish Review* (New York) 2006, Vol. LI, No. 1; Polish version: "Mikrohistoria polskiej literatury emigracyjnej w Nowym Jorku," in: *Teraźniejszość i pamięć przeszłości. Rozumienie historii w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, edited by H. Gosk, A. Zieniewicz, Warszawa: Elipsa, 2006, pp. 245–259.

<sup>8</sup> French: menopause.

completely different.<sup>9</sup> It is certainly stupid, but it is indeed a very stupid condition, these reflections, coupled with weariness or nervous fatigue, which deprives life of any taste. [...] I am mentally dead tired<sup>10</sup> and completely alone. Therefore, I am begging you, keep writing to me – this is the only thing that is able to tear this veil of hopelessness that has fallen over me (letter of May 17, 1950).

In another fragment, he expressed delight in the poems of his friend, but at the same time – doubts about his own works:

Very beautiful poems.<sup>11</sup> The whole world and your own world – I believe that yours is as much yours as it can be – where you move with the jealousy-inspiring ease of old Ariel – or young Prospero.<sup>12</sup> I am talking about jealousy, because I feel the horrible burden of my own rhetoric, gender and prose, [...] – if I wanted to follow your geese,<sup>13</sup> I would fall down immediately and only a wet stain would be left behind me. I embrace you heartily, my young friend. You have reached poetic youth – greater than in *Wiosna i wino*<sup>14</sup> – an ease unsurpassed and full of significance.<sup>15</sup> Will you still want to be friends with an unsuccessful orator, a heavy prose writer, in short: the finished man that I am? Could you offer me advice on how to regain my talent?"

Tellingly, Lechoń signed this letter: "Your former poet JL" (letter of March 24, 1950).

The answer was almost immediate and expressed in simple "soldier speak":

[...] do not accuse yourself of "lack of talent" or else I will come especially to slap you in the face. You are a conscious man, you exude wit and intelligence, you see people clearly and in your own way, you write 1½ [pages] a day, what more do you want, you madman? Do not be Wittlin,<sup>16</sup> since you're not like him, and this imitation simply doesn't work. That's it. I'm done. Please, say no more about it in the letters, and focus on something else instead<sup>17</sup> (letter of March 29, 1950).

<sup>9</sup> A probable explanation of this idea can be found in Lechoń's *Dziennik* (April 1, 1950): "Kazio Wierzyński once urged me to enter into a very risky marriage. When I was explaining this risk to him, he exclaimed: 'Well, that's it! In the worst case scenario, it will be a so-called tragedy'" [J. Lechoń: *Dziennik*, vol. 1. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1992 p. 257].

<sup>10</sup> Underlined in the original.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to the poems: *24 Szyby w oknie*, *Dzikie gęsi*, *Out town*, *Piosenka wzięzienna*, *Postscriptum* and *Śpiewane między drzewami*, read by Lechoń in the London *Wiadomości* 1950 No. 11 (206) of March 12, which were later included in the volume *Korzec maku* (London 1951).

<sup>12</sup> Characters from Shakespeare's *Tempest*; Ariel – an air-spirit serving the magic-wielding sage; Prospero, the duke of Milan.

<sup>13</sup> This is a reference to one of the commented poems entitled *Dzikie gęsi* [Wild Gees] (see footnote 11).

<sup>14</sup> This volume appeared in Warsaw in 1919 when Wierzyński was 25 years old.

<sup>15</sup> Underlined in the original.

<sup>16</sup> An allusion to Józef Wittlin, widely known among friends and acquaintances for his general dissatisfaction, hypochondria, and the habit of constant complaining. Józef Wittlin (1896–1976) was a novelist, poet, essayist, and translator; before World War II loosely cooperated with the Skamander poetic group; from 1939 he remained in exile; in 1941 he moved to the United States, where he co-edited *Tygodnik Polski* in New York with Jan Lechoń and Kazimierz Wierzyński; co-founder of the PEN Club Center for Writers in Exile.

<sup>17</sup> Most probably, this is a reference to the novel *Bal u senatora*, which Lechoń started writing around 1942 and which he never finished; in the years 1942–1950, only four exten-

In the following years (1951 – 36 letters, or 1953 – 20) a lot of space is devoted to the series “Voice of free writers” in which both poets broadcasted for Radio Free Europe. The poets discuss the selection and mode of determining topics; indirectly, however, what emerges from these letters is a moving image of the misery of the émigré authors. Despite the apparent social and literary successes and the deferential atmosphere surrounding both authors – these days we would call them celebrities – their everyday life was far more humiliating, on the one hand making them seek even poorly-remunerated jobs, and on the other hand not allowing Wierzyński to go too often to New York for the radio recordings he so cherished, because the income from it would just about cover his travel costs. It also turns out that the Wierzyński family house in Sag Harbor, described in many memoirs as a popular and frequently visited meeting place for the emigrant community, was rented out as a guest house in the summer to help ease the financial strain the family endured. It proved popular due its proximity to New York and the hospitality of the host family and the charm of this quiet place that was once a whaling village. Only Lechoń (quite often in the company of his partner, Aubrey Johnston) used to frequent that place as a non-paying guest. Occasionally an already planned visit had to be cancelled, because the Wierzyński family could not afford to refuse accommodation to paying residents. The friends frequently mention the dire financial straits they are in, for instance Wierzyński to Lechoń: “My dear Leszunio, only a pinch of good humour will save our dignity, but what will I do in a month – I don’t know!” (letter of August 28, 1948); – Lechoń to Wierzyński: “[...] what is left is only laughter at one’s own misery. [...] Damn the misery, let’s talk about our geniuses, I mean ourselves. I receive various invitations to events I refuse to go to because I have only a tropical jacket and a pair of formal striped trousers. It makes a bad impression even in Sea Cliff” – and, as if in spite of accounts of his friend who was equally helpless in these matters, he used to ask desperately: “Maybe you can offer me some advice how to get \$1000 or \$500 or \$200 or \$100 or \$25 or \$3 or \$1?”, adding: “[...] even deciding on the stamp for this letter took me three days” (letter of October 20, 1948).

The letters between these two friends constitute, in part, a kind of a social chronicle, the protagonists of which are all the important individuals from the New York émigré community; they are depicted seriously at times, in a joking manner elsewhere, but the images are always mercilessly sharp, and the two cruel mockers severely criticise their “tribesmen.” Among the opinions exchanged in full trust between them, one may encounter the following comment by Lechoń: “Aubrey would be my greatest consolation, if it were not for the fact that I cannot be honest with him because I do not

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sive fragments were published in *Tygodnik Polski* and the London *Wiadomości* (collected and later edited by T. Januszewski, published in Warsaw 1981); in the archives of the poet in PIASA in New York one may find individual handwritten manuscripts of about 500 pages.

want to spoil his opinion about Poles” (letter of July 3, 1947). The wide array of characters portrayed in the letters also constitutes a unique socio-political, intellectual, artistic, psychological and moral kaleidoscope. The “sting and pitch” of satire aimed at others, make these fragments resemble the pamphlet genre with a unique artistic taste. Among these stories one may find the following images, drawn with Lechoń’s pen (trying to provide his friend with entertainment during an illness, taking his thoughts away from his suffering from kidney stones):

I would like to write to you a lot of happy things – but right now nothing comes to my mind – especially because I have been travelling a bit with the movie<sup>18</sup> recently and have not had time to investigate the sins of my countrymen. Yesterday there was a show in Glen Cove, where I met Kondracki<sup>19</sup> in the company of a very attractive boy, who could, with his intelligence and appearance, stir anxiety in the heart of many an older man. Kondracki introduced him to me: “This is George Kondracki, my son. Unfortunately, he does not speak Polish. But Czapski,<sup>20</sup> not knowing him, approached him on the street in Paris and asked: Aren’t you a Pole?”. You have to agree that this is a beautiful story and I have reserved it especially for you as a premiere (letter of May 29, 1950).

Similarly they dealt rather mercilessly with cultural and literary life in the country, oppressed by regime politics, and with respect to its participants – writers, directors and theatre actors (frequently their close friends from before the war), noting signs of opportunism, to which they failed to provide either moral or artistic consent.

One needs to admit, however, that they were also very harsh critics towards each other, although the sharpness of their remarks was often softened by their joke-like nature.

The use of wit, often of the *pure nonsense* kind – a characteristic element of their earlier literary games they practised in the Skamander group<sup>21</sup> – is

<sup>18</sup> This is a reference to the screenings of the film *Ostatnie dni Warszawy*, with which Lechoń – providing the foreword – travelled in the first half of 1950 through various Polish diaspora centres of the East Coast. I wrote more about this in the essay “Skamandryci na emigracji w świetle najnowszych badań w archiwach amerykańskich. Nowy Jork – Chicago – Stanford w Kalifornii,” in: *Meandry skamandrytów*, edited by W. Appel, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2011, pp. 23–49.

<sup>19</sup> Michał Kondracki (1902–1984), a composer; before the war he was co-organiser and vice-president of the Polish Society for Contemporary Music, and vice-president of the Association of Writers and Music Critics; in exile he worked with the radio in Rio de Janeiro, from 1943, while in the United States, he devoted his time mainly to teaching; he was president of The Long Island Little Orchestra Society.

<sup>20</sup> Józef Czapski (1896–1993), a painter and writer; a major in the Polish Army; during World War II, he was initially a prisoner in the camps in the USSR, later he participated in the search for “missing” officers of the Polish Army (in fact the victims of the Katyn murder), the author of the book *Na nieludzkiej ziemi* (in Polish 1949; in English *The Inhuman Land*, 1951); a co-creator of the monthly *Kultura* published by Jerzy Giedroyc and a long-time collaborator of the Literary Institute in Paris.

<sup>21</sup> A group of poets founded in Warsaw in 1918 by Jarosław Iwazkiewicz, Jan Lechoń, Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim and Kazimierz Wierzyński, which had a great influence on the development of Polish contemporary poetry after the regaining of independence.



an extremely significant and very interesting feature of this correspondence. Demanding, for example, an urgent contact with his friend, Wierzyński wrote:

Sunday. Dear Leszek, do not waste your time looking for a nightingale in the air. Just call: Sag Harbor, Long Island, 673 W, and you will hear silver singing in a tube. After six o'clock, this concert costs 0.45 c. Save the nightingale number in your heart. Give us a kiss. Your bird and beetle with Mrs. beetle (postcard of October 2, 1949);

– and on another occasion:

Dear “Flog,” why don't you croak? I go to the pond every day and call: here chick-chick-chick, water chicks respond, and so do ducks, geese, swans, and only the “flog” remains silent. Why are you so self-important? [...] Write immediately, time flies like leaves from a tree. And start croaking, you old frog. Every day I go to the pond: chick-chick, but you don't respond (postcard of October 20, 1953).

They also played with the letters' headings (“Dear Philomath,” “Dear Beetle”), as well as with signatures (“Your Filuś,” “Your Epaminondas, cuckoo and the little spider from Freta Street”): in a most sophisticated and yet witty manner they expressed their mutual affection and friendship. Also, the wishes they used to send to each other usually had a sophisticated form, such as those written to Lechoń for his name day:

Our beloved Writer and Scholar, the Polish Colony from Sag Harbor, the suburban settlers, the pioneers, the bootleggers,<sup>22</sup> the plowmen, the displaced persons, the farmers, the locksmiths, the watchmakers, the dairymen, the political émigrés, the refugees, the resettlers to Siberia, the Cracovians, our folks from the Narew region, the citizens, the presidents, the secretaries, the members, the brothers, the [...],<sup>23</sup> “by chains let's bind the earth around”<sup>24</sup> – all of us, your countrymen, we pay tribute to you and send you best wishes: 100 years, 100 years and \$100” (postcard of March 15, 1950).

One may also find extensive letters which contain absurd stories, such as the description of Tadeusz Kościuszko's imagined visit to Lechoń at Sea Cliff at the recommendation of Stefan Mierzwa,<sup>25</sup> an activist of the Kościuszko Foundation in New York established in order to promote Polish culture in America (letter of May 23, 1948), or Wierzyński's alleged handwritten letter from one Michał Kudła, ballet master, dated “Rio de Janeiro 10 March 1950,” which is an expression of longing for a lost lover, full of nostalgic memories.<sup>26</sup>

The social liberty in using various allusions and associations was also accompanied by total linguistic freedom. And if the authors decided that

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it was supposed to be *butlers*: chief manservants of the house.

<sup>23</sup> In the original, a part of the word was illegible.

<sup>24</sup> Quotation from *Ode to Youth* by A. Mickiewicz, translated by J. Zawadzki.

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Paweł Mierzwa (1892–1971), a Polish activist in the United States, an economist by education; in 1925 he founded the Kościuszko Foundation in New York and its president in the years 1955–1970.

<sup>26</sup> What makes this joke (written in quite a pornographic style) even spicier, is the fact that in the intimate biography of Lechoń, in the Parisian period, there appears Józef Kudła, a dancer of the Polish Ballet – a group led by Bronisława Niżyńska, brought by Lechoń to Paris (as a cultural advisor of the Polish Embassy) for the World Exhibition in 1937, that won the Grand Prix there in the field of dance art.

the words were perhaps not expressive enough or otherwise insufficient, they included drawings (usually of an erotic character).

In addition, they both wrote small poetic texts for entertainment – poems, epigrams, jokes – which can be found either on separate pages, or casually interwoven into a text of a different character. They provide a humorous commentary on current affairs, a form of name-day wishes or a way to encourage quick contact. These texts appeared for the very first time in print, reproduced from the manuscripts, in the APPENDIX to the Polish version of this paper published in *Tematy i Konteksty* in 2011.

There have been no research publications devoted to the biographies of either Lechoń or Wierzyński – undoubtedly among the greatest Polish poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Their life and works from the interwar period have already been studied in detail, which gave rise to numerous excellent publications,<sup>28</sup> but the information about the emigration stage of their lives is still scattered across various essays and articles that often refer to selected facts or issues, but by no means exhausting the issue; books focusing on the interpretation of their writings<sup>29</sup> rarely consider these from the perspective of their lives' events. Biographies cannot be replaced even by memoir volumes,<sup>30</sup> though definitely interesting and needed. It seems that the letters exchanged between these two very close friends may, to some extent, fill this gap, presenting both figures in the context of literature, culture, history and politics of that time, and above all painting “personal portraits” of both men. Moreover, when comparing the correspondence between Lechoń and Wierzyński with the letters of Lechoń and Grydzewski in terms of their content (although he was in a close relationship with both these pen-friends), it seems that the former dialogue is much more private and personal, sometimes verging on the most intimate confession, characteristic of contacts between truly close friends; it is worth emphasising that this state of affairs applies equally to both authors.

<sup>27</sup> For instance the work by W. Łukszo-Nowakowska *Jan Lechoń. Zarys życia i twórczości* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Literackie im. A. Mickiewicza, 1996) or W. Wencel *Wierzyński. Sens ponad klęską. Biografia poety* (Kraków: Instytut Literatury, 2020) is more like an introduction to further research.

<sup>28</sup> Worthy of mention here are the works by M. Dłuska, A. Hutnikiewicz, J.A. Kosiński, R. Loth, I. Opacki, G. Ostasz, J. Stradecki.

<sup>29</sup> For instance: Z. Andres, *Kazimierz Wierzyński. Szkice o twórczości literackiej*, Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1997, or A. Rydz, *Świat nie ma sensu, sens ma sztuka. O powojennej poezji Kazimierza Wierzyńskiego*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2004), and J. Kisielowa, *Retoryka i melancholia. O poezji Jana Lechonia*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2001. Also the book by W. Wyskiel *Kręgi wygnania. Jan Lechoń na obczyźnie. (Krąg pierwszy i drugi)*, Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1988, is a study of a multidisciplinary character, combining history, sociology and even social psychology.

<sup>30</sup> *Wspomnienia o Kazimierzu Wierzyńskim*, compiled and edited by P. Kądziała, Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi,” 2001; *Wspomnienia o Janie Lechoni*, compiled and edited by P. Kądziała, Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi,” 2006.

My work on the critical edition of this correspondence is already finished. The volume was published in 2016. I also find it very interesting to prepare a critical edition of the letters exchanged between Kazimierz Wierzyński and Mieczysław Grydzewski, but it is a much more challenging task, primarily due to the longer time span (1940-1969), and also because of the abundance of texts (in total about 1,100 letters), thus requiring much more work. I did not hesitate to undertake this research and this correspondence will be published in 2022 (in four volumes). This will lead to the creation of a “Skamander-emigration trilogy,” enclosed in the magical triad: Grydzewski–Lechoń–Wierzyński, constituting, on the one hand, an important resource and a basis for further literary and historical research, and on the other hand – just a fascinating read.

## Appendix

### I

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on letter paper; date: 1948 or 1949 – only in those years the Wierzyński family stayed in Stockbridge in Massachusetts in March when Lechoń celebrated his name day.*

Stockbridge, Mass. March, 17

Fifi!<sup>31</sup>

Zdrowia, szczęścia, pomyślności,  
Co wieczora pełno gości,  
Byś był piękny, dzielny, Chrobry,  
Jak król polski i jak Obry,  
I dukaty miał i sławę  
I niezłomną – hm! – buławę\*  
Twój Ryszard Lwie Serce

\* To – hm! – to pod wpływem Terleckiego.

[Fifi! / I wish you health, happiness, prosperity, / A lot of guests every evening, / May you be beautiful, courageous, Brave, Like the Polish king and like Obry,<sup>32</sup> / May you have ducats and fame / And a headstrong– hm! – mace<sup>\*33</sup> / Your Richard the Lionheart<sup>34</sup>

\* This – hm! – has been influenced by Terlecki.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The spelling and punctuation in the texts of Lechoń and Wierzyński published here in Polish has been standardised and modernised.

<sup>32</sup> A humorous Polish version of the name Aubrey [pronounced: Obrej], a longtime partner of Lechoń, Aubrey Johnston (who died in 2003), with whom the poet frequently visited the Wierzyński family and who is repeatedly mentioned in correspondence between friends.

<sup>33</sup> A euphemistically expressed joke of an erotic character.

<sup>34</sup> A form of signature sometimes used by Wierzyński in correspondence with close friends – not only with Lechoń.

<sup>35</sup> It was impossible to establish the meaning of this comment, which seems to be an allusion, clear to both friends, to Tymon Terlecki (1905–2000), an outstanding émigré literary historian, critic and publicist.

II

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on a postcard; postmark date: November 21, 1949.*

*Warum Schumanna*

Dlaczego ptaki umilkły, listeczki opadły i wiatry lute wieją,  
Dlaczego słońce nie świeci, nie świeci uśmiechem ani złota nadzieją,  
Dlaczego pusto na polach, pusto na drogach i we mgłę się gubi ścieżka?  
Bo jesień? Bo smutna jesień? Nie! Bo nie ma przy Tobie Leszka.  
Bo Lesio z innymi. Lesio zapomniał! Bo Lesio nie pisze!  
Tobie zostawił smutek, samotność i opuszczenia ciszę.  
Bo nie pocieszysz, bo nie utuli – w pieścizotach skąpy, oszczędny,  
Dla Ciebie ta pustka, te wiatry lute i smutek, smutek obłądny,  
Dla Ciebie tylko wspomnienie, że kiedyś inaczej, inaczej było.  
Wspomnienia, od których serce niekiedy jeszcze drgnie pod mogiłą,  
Pod ciemną mogiłą, a tej mogiły brzozy płaczące strzegą,  
I serce tam kwili i marzy, i szepce: dlaczego, dlaczego, dlaczego?  
Joachim Olejniczak (Pumpport, Conn.)  
(wnuk Asnyka)

W listopadzie 1949

[*Warum* by Schumann<sup>36</sup>

Why did the birds stop singing, the leaves fall down and why do the cold winds keep blowing, / Why isn't the sun shining, shining with a smile or with golden hope, / Why are the fields empty, the roads too and why is the path is lost in the fog? / Because of autumn? Because of this sad autumn? No! Because Leszek is not with you. / Because Lesio is with others. Lesio has forgotten and does not write anymore! / He has left you with sadness, loneliness and the silence of abandonment. / He will offer neither comfort nor cuddles –so sparing in his caresses, / What's left for you is this emptiness, these cold winds and this mad sadness, / What's left for you is just a memory that things used to be different. / Memories, which may still sometimes move the heart in the grave, / In the dark grave, the grave guarded by silver birches, / And the heart lies there weeping, dreaming and whispering: why, why, why?

Joachim Olejniczak (Pumpport, Conn.) / (A. Asnyk's grandson)<sup>37</sup>

In November 1949]

III

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*Manuscript written on letter paper; on the envelope addressed to Sag Harbor, the postmark date reads: December 2, 1949.*

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<sup>36</sup> A reference to the title of one of the piano compositions of the German composer Robert Schumann *Warum* (from the series *Fantasiestücke*, op. 12 no 3), also known as the author of many chamber music pieces, which usually have the character of private confessions.

<sup>37</sup> The entire signature is a hoax – including the non-existent city of Pumpport, Connecticut; English: *to pumpport* – to squirt, which may also evoke certain erotic associations [?]. Adam Asnyk (1838–1897) was a Polish poet and playwright; an author of many poems based on folk motifs, reflective lyrics as well as erotic poems.

Zołzy Wielkie  
w grudniu 1949

Do Joachima Olejniczaka

Kiedy cały nasz naród wśród serc zgodnych bicia  
Skląda Ci hołd za trudy szlachtetnego życia,  
Gdy szlachta, duchowieństwo i kmieć nasz pospołu  
Dziękują Ci za lata zbożnego mozołu,  
Kiedy pośród rodaków radosnego krzyku  
Brzmi dźwięk Twego imienia od Tatr do Bałtyku,  
Pozwól, Czcigodny Panie, że i ja z innemi  
Rzucę do stóp Twych skromne kwiaty polskiej ziemi.  
Było to bardzo dawno, już pół wieku prawie,  
Gdym w Stryju obok Ciebie siadł na szkolnej ławie,  
A choć przyjaźń zawarta nie była zbyt długa,  
Boś Ty wznosił się na Parnas, jam wrócił do pługą,  
Wspomnienie chwil tych zawsze na pamięć mą wraca,  
Koi bóle i starość samotną ozłaca.  
Gdziekolwiek szybowałeś na skrzydłach tęsknoty,  
Jam Twojego natchnienia bacznie śledził loty  
I tony, co spod Twojej wypływały ręki,  
Nie wiem, czyli gdzie żywsze budziły oddźwięki  
Niżli w tym starym dworku, gdzie razem na ścianie  
Wisiła karabela i Twój portret, Panie.  
Więc dziś, kiedy król szwedzki, dawnych walk niepomny,  
Czyni nam w Twojej osobie ten honor ogromny  
I kiedy laurem Nobla – nomen-omen świetne –  
Wieńczy zarazem dzieło jak życie szlachtetne,  
Gdy serc milion Cię polskich otoczyło wieńcem,  
Ja, co szczęście to miałem, zem znał Cię młodzieńcem,  
Do wieńca, co Ojczyzna ku chwale Twojej zwija,  
Dorzucam drżącą dłonią polny kwiat  
Spod Stryja  
Fortunat-Zołza Rembiszewski

[Zołzy Wielkie<sup>38</sup> / in December 1949  
To Joachim Olejniczak

When our entire nation, all hearts beating as one / Pays tribute to you for the hardships  
of your noble life, / When the nobles, the clergy and peasants all together / Thank you for  
the years of respectable work, / When among the countrymen's joyous shouts / Your name  
can be heard from the Tatras to the Baltic Sea,<sup>39</sup> / Allow me, Honourable Sir, together with  
others / To throw at your feet the humble flowers of the Polish soil. / It was a long time  
ago, almost half a century, / When back there in Stryj, I sat next to you at a school desk,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A non-existent place; a joke or an allusion of so far unknown significance.

<sup>39</sup> This fragment is probably a reference to numerous artistic events held at that time, author's meetings with Wierzyński and publicity events related to the book *The Life and Death of Chopin*, published in New York in October 1949, written within two years (1947-1949) spent in Stockbridge, and received enthusiastically both in the American music milieu and the Polish emigration circle.

<sup>40</sup> In the years 1907–1912 Wierzyński was a student at the State Junior High School for boys in Stryj; his alleged school friendship with Lechoń is an artistically-oriented move.

/ Although our friendship did not last long, / As you have risen up to the Parnassus,<sup>41</sup>  
and I returned to the plough, / These moments will always remain in my memory, / They  
soothe my pain and sweeten this lonely old age. / Wherever you were flying on the wings  
of longing, / I carefully followed the direction of your inspiration / And the sounds that  
were coming out of your hands, / Perhaps nowhere else could resonate more / Than in this  
old mansion, where asabre / and your portrait, Sir, hung together on the wall. / So today,  
when the Swedish king, oblivious to the past fights, / Does us a great honour by awarding  
you / With the Nobel Prize, thus concluding – nomen-omen a noble – / Work and a noble  
life at the same time, / When millions of Polish hearts have surrounded you with a wreath,  
/ I, who was lucky to have known you as a young man, / To this wreath that the Homeland  
is weaving in your honor, / I am adding, with a trembling hand, a wild flower.

From Stryj / Fortunat-Zoźła Rembiszewski]

#### IV

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*At the end of the handwritten letter of January 6, 1950.*

Nie dla psa kiełbasa, nie dla kota szperka,  
Nie będzie tak dobrze, by bolała nerka.  
\* \* \*

Niech zabrzmie muzyka, warszawski sztajerek,  
Niech Kaziowi piasek wysypie się z nerek.  
\* \* \*

Kto nie przeszedł łagrów, kto nie znał Obierka,  
Ten nie wie, co znaczy – kiedy boli nerka.  
\* \* \*

Nerko, moja nerko, moje ty kochanie,  
Cóż to za okropne łupanie i rwanie?  
Trzeba było nie pić i nie hulać, bracie,  
To by niepotrzebne były ciepłe gacie.

[Sausage is just too good for a dog, pork fat is just too good for a cat, / It will not be too  
good for a kidney to hurt. \* \* \* Let the music play, the Warsaw sztajerek, / Let Kazio's kidneys  
empty out the sand. \* \* \* Who did not experience labour camps, who did not know Obierek,<sup>42</sup>  
/ He does not know what it means when the kidney hurts. \* \* \* Kidney, my kidney, my love,  
/ What is this terrible splitting and twinging? / Had you not drunk and caroused so much,  
/ You would now not need warm pants.]

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<sup>41</sup> As a student, Wierzyński participated in the works of the school's literary society (in 1911 he was its vice-chairman), winning literary prizes (for instance in 1911 he received the second prize in the competition organised by the Literary Society founded at "Zjednoczenie," the organisation of the National Youth in Kraków).

<sup>42</sup> Leopold J. Obierek (1902–1986), a doctor of laws, social activist, pre-war director of the Labour Fund in the Śląskie Voivodeship; from August 1945 to June 1947 he was administrator of *Tygodnik Polski* edited and published in New York by Lechoń; Wierzyński was a member of the editorial board in 1943–1944 and often published here until the end of its existence in 1947; both poets' cooperation with him was marked by numerous difficulties: due to a conflict, at the end of 1946 Wierzyński gave up his share in the newspaper.

V

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*An undated letter preserved in typewritten copy; probably from the turn of 1950, when Wierzyński had already been struggling with kidney stones for a long time.*

Kochany, jestem chory, leżę w łóżku.  
Bolą mnie nerki i przechodzą mi przez głowę różne myśli.  
Np. co to jest chora nerka?

Chora nerka jest to zdrada klerka.  
Gdyby się w młodości nie żyło w trzasku<sup>43</sup> i blasku,  
To by się w nerczkach nie miało potem piasku.  
Gdyby się w młodości nie chlało,  
To by się w nerczkach kamieni nie miało.  
Ale nie myśl o nerce,  
Miej serce i patrzaj w serce.

[My dear, I'm sick, I'm in bed. / My kidneys hurt and various thoughts go through my head. / For example, what is a sick kidney? / A sick kidney is an artist's betrayal. / If one hadn't lived his youth in a hubbub and in the limelight, / One wouldn't later have sand in his kidneys. / If one hadn't drunk in his youth so much, / one wouldn't have stones in his kidneys. / But don't think about the kidney, / Have the heart to look into the heart.<sup>44</sup>]

VI

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on letter paper.*

Kochany Leszku,  
Życzę Ci milionika w mieszku,  
Życia bez zamętu,  
Wielkiego talentu,  
Wierszy, poematów, powieści,  
Która się w dwustu tomach nie zmieści.  
A także na Broadway'u sztuczki –  
I całujemy czule.  
Twoje dwa Żuczki

14.III.1950

[Dear Leszek,  
May you have a million in your pouch, / A life without disruption, / Great talent, / Poems, epic poems, novels,<sup>45</sup> / Which will not fit in two hundred volumes. / And also some Broadway tricks<sup>46</sup> – / And we kiss you tenderly. / Your two little Beetles  
March 14, 1950]

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<sup>43</sup> In the typewritten copy prepared by H. Wierzyńska, there is a spelling mistake in the Polish word: instead of "w trasku," there should be "w trzasku."

<sup>44</sup> The verse quoted from the poem *Romantyczność* by A. Mickiewicz.

<sup>45</sup> See: footnote 17.

<sup>46</sup> Most probably this refers to the play that Lechoń was writing and which was to be entitled *Porwanie Harisona* [The Kidnapping of Harison] (or *Obywatel świata* [The Citizen

*Under the text there is a drawing of two hearts pierced by an arrow, with monograms inside: in one of them "L," in the other "K. H."*

## VII

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on a postcard; postmark date: March 16, 1950.*

*The closing part of the letter:*

[...] Co do miłości, nie masz racji. Jestem jedynym żywym sercem na wygnaniu. Wy wszyscy jesteście popiołem spaleni na nicę. Więc z czym do gościa? Kto Cię tak pieścił jak ja? W czym uścisku mdlałeś? Gdzie jest teraz Micky? Gdzie Mustafa? Przy Tobie? Choćby myślałam przy Tobie? A ja przecież pukam co dzień do okienka.

Ptaki wiosenne lecą,  
obłoki wiosenne świecą,  
I noc wiosenna bez dna,  
Wiatry wiosenne wieją,  
I wiosnę czuć na Brodweju  
– to wszystko, wszystko ja!

[...] As for love, you are wrong. I am the only living heart in exile. You are all ashes burned to nothingness. So what are you talking about? Who else caressed you like I did? In whose arms did you faint? Where is Micky now? Where is Mustafa?<sup>47</sup> Are they with you? Are they at least thinking about you?<sup>48</sup> And I knock on the window every day.

Spring birds are flying, / spring clouds are shining, / And this long spring night, / Spring winds are blowing, / And one feels the spring on Broadway<sup>49</sup> / – that's all, that's all me!]

## VIII

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on a postcard; postmark date: March 18, 1950.*

Codziennie leci kartka, jak ptaszek drży wiosenny,  
Codziennie śpiewa: Leszku, Leszku wysokopienny,  
Chłopaczku nasz, pacholę, pieśniarzu i wróżbito,  
Dlaczego aż w New Yorku gniazdeczko Ci uwito,  
Dlaczego nie tu z nami, wśród swoich pól i łąków,  
Gdzie wznieslibyśmy w górę kielichy roztruchanów,  
Gdzie pieśnią i weselem dzień czcilibyśmy święty,  
Józefa, Jana, Leszka, naszego Podbipięty,  
Naszego Batorego – ach, króla i kochanka,

---

of the World] or *Człowiek zza żelaznej kurtyny* [A Man from Behind the Iron Curtain]); it is mentioned in *Dziennik* and in the correspondence with Mieczysław Grydzewski; however, the advanced project was not completed, only fragments of the text have survived (also in English translation).

<sup>47</sup> This is probably a reference to Lechoń's partners from different periods of his life; one of them was a Brazilian, Mustafa Sned, whose photograph with a dedication to Lechoń of February 24, 1941 from Rio de Janeiro has been preserved in the poet's archive.

<sup>48</sup> Emphasised in the original.

<sup>49</sup> In the Polish original this word was Polonised to *Brodwej*.



Niech dzwoni pieśń, ostroga, niech dzwoni dolar, szklanka.  
Niech żyje Jan i Lechoń, przyjaciel i poeta  
Z Paryża i z New Yorku, a przede wszystkim z FRETA.

[Every day a postcard<sup>50</sup> flies, trembling like a bird in the spring, / It sings every day: Leszek, Leszek high and tall, / Our little boy, henchman, singer and fortune-teller, / Why was the nest made for you as far away as New York, / Why not here with us, among our familiar fields and meadows, / Where we would raise the chalices, / Where we would celebrate the holy day with a song and rejoicing, / Józef, Jan, Leszek,<sup>51</sup> our Podbipięta,<sup>52</sup> / Our Batory<sup>53</sup> – ah, the king and the lover, / Let the song play, let spur, dollar and glass ring. / Long live Jan and Lechoń, a friend and a poet / From Paris and New York, but above all from FRETA.<sup>54</sup>]

## IX

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*The closing part of the handwritten letter on letter paper, dated: 29 March, Wednesday [date: 1950 –determined on the basis of the letter's content and according to calendar days].*

Lesiupuszką!  
Całuję Cię, trubadurze,  
rzucam w przestrzeń różę,  
niech morzem popłynie,  
niech Ci szyjkę owinie,  
niech zaszeleści  
i listkiem popieści.  
Twój Kazimierz i Alfa & Omega z Aniołów Wierzyńska

[Lesiupuszką! / I kiss you, troubadour, / I throw a rose into the air, / Let it float on the sea, / let it wrap your neck, / Let it rustle / and let it caress you with its leaf. / Your Kazimierz and Alfa & Omega from the Angels Wierzyńska]

## X

*Lechoń to Halina Wierzyńska for her name day.*

*Manuscript on letter paper; letter dated May 22, 1950.*

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<sup>50</sup> Previous correspondence of Wierzyński addressed to Lechoń was dated: March 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16.

<sup>51</sup> Leszek and Józef are the baptismal names of the poet, Jan his adopted artistic pseudonym. Lechoń celebrated his name day on St. Joseph's Day (19 March), the calendars at that time did not recognise the name Lech or Leszek, only Lechosław. In time this date became part of the poet's literary legend, because it was said that he had chosen the day of his name day deliberately due to his fascination with Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

<sup>52</sup> Longinus Podbipięta, one of the main characters of H. Sienkiewicz's novel *Fire and Sword*; a nobleman-soldier famous for his great strength and courage.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Báthory (1533–1586), Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland.

<sup>54</sup> The name of the street in the Nowe Miasto district in Warsaw; in fact, this was not the address of Lechoń, but the street close to the street Przyrynek 4, where from 1918 (until he left for Paris in April 1930) Lechoń lived with his parents in the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary Refuge Home for the Elders, administered by his father, by the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Na cóż Ci me, Halusiu, życzenia najszczerze,  
Kiedy mewasz na co dzień i to jakie wiersze?  
I miłość, co wyć pragnie, też smutna ucicha,  
Gdy kochasz Krasińskiego, cóż że Szopen wzdycha?

[Halusia, why would you need my most sincere wishes, / When you have the best poems every day? / And love, which wants to wail, is silent and sad, / When you love Krasiński,<sup>55</sup> and don't care that Chopin is yearning for you?]

## XI

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*An undated manuscript on a small decorative card with a drawing reproduction of John James Audubon "White-crowned Pigeon" (from the album "Birds of America"); Halina Wierzyńska recorded the date: January 10, 1951.*

Co u mnie? Marzenia, marzenia,  
są liliowe, kolorowe,  
kiedy tylko schylę głowę,  
gdy chodzimy, gdy siedzimy,  
same ku nam lecą rymy,  
oplatają serce, zmysły,  
już do myśli Ci się wcisły  
i już jesteś teraz zgoła  
pół człowieka – pół anioła.  
Od poranka do wieczoru  
biegną myśli do Harboru  
i całują szumem fali  
pysk Kaźmierza, ręce Hali.

[How am I doing? Dreams, dreams, / they are lilac, colourful, / whenever I bend my head, / when we're walking, when we're sitting, / the rhymes are flying to us, / they entwine the heart, the senses, / they have already entered your thoughts / and you are now completely / half man – half angel. / From morning to evening / ideas run to Harbor<sup>56</sup> / and they kiss with the sound of the wave / the face of Kaźmierz, the hands of Hala.]

## XII

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*Undated manuscript on a small decorative card with a reproduction of J. J. Audubon's drawing "Cardinal" (from the album "Birds of America"); Halina Wierzyńska recorded the date: January 11, 1951.*

To ostatnie moje piórko,  
Co ma lecieć z lotną chmurką,  
Co jak dobrej wróżki ręką

---

<sup>55</sup> Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859) was one of the three bards, the greatest poets of Polish Romanticism. Lechoń and Wierzyński were both treated as bards of the post-war emigration.

<sup>56</sup> A reference to Sag Harbor, a port town on Long Island, where the Wierzyński family lived from September 1949.

Ma zapukać w Twe okienko.  
Ale kto tam w oknie siedzi?  
Czemu nie ma odpowiedzi?  
Jeszcze jedna zwłoka mała.  
Fiut! I kwita z kardynała.

[This is my last feather,<sup>57</sup> / That is to fly with a soft cloud, / That is, just like a hand of a good fairy / To knock at your window. / But who is sitting at the window? / Why is there no answer?<sup>58</sup> / Just one more small delay. / Whoosh! And the cardinal<sup>59</sup> is gone.]

### XIII

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*Undated manuscript on a decorative card with a reproduction of J. J. Audubon's drawing "Red-headed Woodpecker" (from the album "Birds of America"); Halina Wierzyńska recorded the date: February 15, 1951.*

Ach, ktoś puka, stuka, woła.  
Czy Ty słyszysz głos dzięcioła,  
Który w śnieżną noc zimową  
Leciał z dali pod dom Twój,  
Koło Twego przysiadł biurka,  
Utul, ogrzej jego piórka,  
Bo inaczej każdy powie,  
A ja pierwszy – żeś jest chuj!

Kaziu! Co to znaczy? Jeżeli jesteś chory – to powinienesz był napisać małą kartkę, jeżeli jesteś zdrow – wielki list. W każdym razie ani jednej chwili dłużej nie mam zamiaru czekać. Co to jest? Czy przyjedziesz? Czekam na telegramę. Ściskam Was. *You are my Valentine.* Leszek

[Ah, someone is knocking and calling. / Can you hear the woodpecker's voice / Which on a snowy winter night / Flew from afar to your home, / It sat down right next to your desk, / Calm it down and warm up its feathers, / Otherwise everyone will say / And I will be the first to do so – that you are a prick!

Kaziu! What does this mean? If you are sick – you should have written a small card, and if you are healthy – a long letter. Anyway, I'm not going to wait any longer.<sup>60</sup> What is this? Will you come? I'm waiting for a telegram. I send you my hugs. *You are my Valentine.*<sup>61</sup> Leszek]

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<sup>57</sup> On the previous day, January 10, 1951, Lechoń sent two other cards with reproductions of bird drawings by J. J. Audubon (one of them is quoted above).

<sup>58</sup> Wierzyński's last letter was dated December 5, 1950, so according to his correspondence habits, Lechoń decided that the break was already too long.

<sup>59</sup> The poem is written on a reproduction of a drawing of a bird popular in America called cardinal (due to bright red plumage); the text in the next letter also referred to a drawing, but this time of a woodpecker.

<sup>60</sup> Wierzyński's last piece of correspondence to Lechoń (a postcard with a short text) was dated January 26, 1951.

<sup>61</sup> *You are my Valentine* was used in the letter in English - probably on this basis Halina Wierzyńska dated this letter *post factum* as February 15, 1951.

XIV

*Wierzyński to Lechoń.*

*Undated manuscript on letter paper; presumed date: before April 19, 1951 [i.e. the date of the death of Stanisław Centkiewicz, who died the earliest of all those mentioned in the letter].*

Ja nie lubię się skarżyć, nie jestem cierpiętnik.  
Wolisz sam z sobą? Dobrze, pisz sobie pamiętnik.  
Gadaj z kim chcesz, ze Solskim, Obierkiem, Rajchmanem,  
Centkiewiczem, Strzetelskim, Yollesem, Bejtmanem,  
Z Lottą Lehman, ze sławną Lehman Rozalindą,  
Z Cittadini, Burrową, byle jaką pindą,  
Z panią Burchard, a nawet z panią Jordanową,  
Z Czermańską i Kondracką, Ochrymowiczową –  
Niech Ci wyjdzie na zdrowie! Lecz tego nauczka:  
Nie dostaniesz już więcej liścika od Żuczka.

[I don't like to complain, I'm not a sufferer. / Do you prefer to write to yourself? Fine, then write a diary.<sup>62</sup> / Talk to whoever you wish, to Solski, Obierek, Rajchman, / Centkiewicz, Strzetelski, Yolles, Bejtman, / ToLotta Lehman, to the famous Lehman Rozalinda, / To Cittadini, Burr, to any shrew, / To Mrs. Burchard, and even to Mrs. Jordan / To Czermańska and Kondracka, Ochrymowiczowa<sup>63</sup> – / May this be good for you! But learn this lesson: / You will no longer receive a letter from your Beetle.]

*Instead of a signature under the text, there is a drawing of a heart pierced by an arrow.*

XV

*The Wierzyński family to Lechoń.*

*Manuscript on letter paper; probable date: 1956 [not earlier, because the letter is signed, among others, on behalf of Grzegorz, the son of Wierzyński adopted in July 1953, and in 1954 and 1955 there are other name day wishes for Lechoń].*

<sup>62</sup> From August 30, 1949, Lechoń wrote *Dziennik* (ed. vol. 1–3. London 1970, 1973; Warsaw 1992–1993).

<sup>63</sup> The people mentioned here are Lechoń's friends from the Polish emigration community in New York: Waclaw Solski (1897–1990) – a prose writer and a political activist; Leopold Obierek [see footnote 42]; Henryk Floyar-Rajchman (1893–1951) – a legionary, a major of the Polish Army, an independence activist in exile; Stanisław Centkiewicz (died in 1951) – a journalist; Stanisław Strzetelski (1895–1969) – a journalist cooperating with Radio Free Europe, an emigration independence activist; Piotr P. Yolles (1892–1958) – a publicist and an editor of the *Nowy Świat* daily; Wincenty Bejtman – involved in the film industry, engaging Lechoń in various production, promotion and propaganda film projects; Lotta Lehman and Lehman Rozalinda – in the poem they are only stylistic “figures,” in fact these were Cora Lehmann and Estella Marburg who rented a room to Lechoń in their Manhattan apartment; Irena Cittadini (1903–1976) – the widow of the American millionaire John Warden and a patron of many Polish artists; Cecylia Burr (1886–1964) – the widow of the American millionaire George H. Burr, a Polish diaspora activist and Lechoń's patron; Mrs. Burchard [?]; Felicja Jordanowa – a member of the Women's Circle at PIASA, participating in organising artistic and social events; Janina Czermańska (1911–2004) – the wife of the cartoonist and prose writer Zdzisław Czermański; Maria Krystyna Joanna Kondracka – the wife of Michał Kondracki [see footnote 19]; Teodozja Ochrymowicz (ca 1893–1963) – the wife of Władysław, a pre-war singer and actor, with whom she hosted a Polish-language programme at the WNBX radio station in New York.

17.III.

Kochany Leszku!  
Nie trzeba słów, nie trzeba słów –  
W tym dniu Twojego imienia  
Wezbrane serce starego druha  
Ma tylko skromne życzenia .

Zdrowia jak Pytłasiński,  
Rymów jak Adam,  
Forsy jak Spitzman,  
I więcej życzeń nie składam.  
Kazimierz, Halina, Grzegorz  
Żukowie

[March 17 / Dear Leszek!

Words are needless, words are needless – / On you name day / Your old fellow's filled-up heart / Has only humble wishes.<sup>64</sup> / May you have health like Pytłasiński,<sup>65</sup> / Rhymes like Adam,<sup>66</sup> / Money like Spitzman,<sup>67</sup> / And I don't have any more wishes. / Kazimierz, Halina, Grzegorz / Beetles]

*Next to the signature, there is a drawing of a heart pierced by an arrow.*

## XVI

*The Wierzyński family to Lechoń.*

*Note on the Christmas and New Year card with a related illustration and printed wishes: "With Every Good Wish for Christmas and the New Year"; undated.*

Bo czułość, czułość bynajmniej nie jest mrzonką –  
Zgaduję ją, gdy faluje Twa pierś okryta koronką  
Żuk – Skarszewscy

[Because affection, affection is not a pipe dream – / I'm guessing when your lace-covered chest is waving<sup>68</sup> / Żuk – Skarszewscy<sup>69</sup>]

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<sup>64</sup> This stanza begins with a quote and mimics the rhythm of one of the stanzas of J. Kasprówicz's poem *Zbudź się dziewczyno ze snu* [Girl, wake up from your sleep] (from the volume *Chwile*. Lviv 1911), which reads: "Words are needless, words are needless! / Man overestimates their value. / The filled-up heart is / Much more meaningful when silent. / Girl, awake from your sleep."

<sup>65</sup> Władysław Pytłasiński (1863–1933) – a wrestler and a sports trainer, in 1900 the world champion in wrestling.

<sup>66</sup> A reference to Adam Mickiewicz.

<sup>67</sup> Henryk Alfred Spitzman-Jordan (aka: Szpitzman; 1906–1967)– a pre-war oil entrepreneur from Drohobych; a construction investor in exile in Brazil, a major shareholder of one of the traditional and leading banks in New York; a philanthropist.

<sup>68</sup> Presumably, it is a quote or a paraphrase that has not yet been decoded.

<sup>69</sup> An allusion to the name of a minor writer and publicist Tadeusz Żuk-Skarszewski (1858–1933); before World War I he was in London and Paris, sending correspondence to the national press; in the years 1920–1921 he was director of the Polish Information Office in New York and co-creator of the monthly *The Poland*; an author of expressionising novels,

XVII

*Lechoń to Wierzyński.*

*A note on the Christmas and New Year card with a related illustration and printed wishes: "Christmas Greetings and the best wishes for the New Year;" undated.*

Z pikadorskim pozdrowieniem,  
ze skamandryckim życzeniem  
z piłsudczykowskim turoniem,  
z emigranckim szarym koniem,  
rymem, który robi bokiem,  
z nowojorskim do sim rokiem,  
z podmariackim Starym dziadkiem  
dzieli z Tobą się opłatkiem  
Twój najukochańszy Leszek

[With a Pikador's greeting, / with a Skamandrite's wish / with Piłsudski's turon,<sup>70</sup> / with an emigrant's grey horse, / with the rhyme that's quite exhausted, / with the New York-style "do siego roku,"<sup>71</sup> / with the Old Grandpa<sup>72</sup> in St Mary's Basilica / is sharing a wafer with you / Your beloved Leszek]

Translated by Karolina Puchała-Ladzińska

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influenced by W. Berent, combining elements of moral satire and harsh criticism of modern civilisation with an attempt to symbolically approach the issue of values; a translator of Ch. Dickens and R. Hughes.

<sup>70</sup> This is probably a reference to one of the political nativity scenes of "Pikador" performed in the Belvedere in 1922 at the invitation of J. Piłsudski.

<sup>71</sup> A reference to the old Polish form of Christmas wishes: "Do siego roku!," meaning: "let's stay in health and peace until the end of this year and the beginning of the next one."

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps this is again an allusion to Piłsudski, called Old Chap or Grandpa by his former soldiers and supporters, who was buried in Kraków (though not in St. Mary's Church, but at the Wawel Royal Castle). Both poets were committed followers of the Marshal's political programme and belonged to its most active exponents, involved in keeping the memory of him alive.

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