

# Jan Lechoń toward Romantic period

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Being only six years old Leszek Serafinowicz, later Jan Lechoń, the poet, was interested in literature, history and painting. He was raised in the intellectual family, in which books were highly valued and tradition of insurrection was alive. Lechoń's grandfather was a soldier fighting in Napoleonic era<sup>1</sup>, his father was a lawyer and well known social activist and his mother was a teacher leading home school. Political, social and literary topics were discussed in the environment of the young poet and yet while being a child Lechoń seeped in the intellectual and patriotic atmosphere of his home. When he got touched by the insulting statement concerning Poland, he wrote the following lyric:

“Boże, zbaw Polskę”.  
Pieśń ta płynie  
Pod Orła Białego Sztandarem  
I nad domami miasta Warszawy  
I pod tym niebem niebieskoszarym,  
Lecz, gdy w te pieśni człek śmiech dokłada  
I drwi z nich lekceważąco,  
To ludzie, którzy to czynią,  
Oni są podli i błędzą<sup>2</sup>.

The handwriting of ten years old Lechoń, decorated with beautiful illustrations, looks like a piece of writing of an adult person. Zygmunt Serafinowicz, Lechoń's elder brother, mentioned that books, drawings and paintings were the world in which Leszek was living and feeling best:

Jedna z naszych kuzynek często opowiadała, jak poszła z nim na spacer. Las, łąka, kwiaty, słońce. Leszek dłuższą chwilę patrzył na to w milczeniu i potem powiedział: “Jak by to ładnie wyglądało na obrazku”<sup>3</sup>.

1 He was born in 1793, 106 (!) years before his famous grandson.

2 Kosiński J. A., *Album rodzinne Jana Lechońa*, Warsaw 1993, p. 224.

3 Ibidem, p. 224.

An extraordinary maturity of a thirteen years old boy talking like a life-experienced decadent is shown in the first two volumes of his poems: *Na złotym polu* (1912) and *Po różnych ścieżkach* (1913). Both of them were dedicated to Leopold Staff.

Czemu przez życie iść tak źle?  
Czemu tak smutno na duszy?  
Czemu nam burze niebo śle  
I echa wiosny głuszy<sup>4</sup>.

In verses above Lechoń referred to the literary traditions: romanticism, positivism and modernism. Most of his works basis on referring to symbols and cultural legacy. In his later volumes he also invokes to baroque aesthetics. However poetry of romanticism was his main reference till the rest of his life<sup>5</sup>.

W złotych strzępach liści drzewa nocą stoją,  
Księżyc srebrne smugi po ziemi rozwłóczy.  
Nic mi nie pomoże na tęsknotę moją,  
Już mnie żadne nieszczęście od niej nie oduczy<sup>6</sup>.

Lechoń thought that showing the mystery and convincing a reader that everything is this mystery are the aims of literary practice.

I na dnie każdej prawdy widzę rzeczy ciemne,  
I w każdej slysze ciszy okrzyk nieprzebrzmiały,  
Wszystko wciąż mi się zdaje wielkie i tajemne,  
Jak pagórki Ojcowa, kiedy byłem mały<sup>7</sup>.

*Karmazynowy poemat*, a slim volume published by Lechoń soon after his maturity exam guaranteed him a place in poetic Pantheon. After reviews written by critics, poets and men of culture there were no doubts that *Karmazynowy poemat* were received as a literary revelation. Juliusz Sakowski mentioned that the debut of Lechoń was a remarkable success, even though it was not including so called scream of generation. There was, however,

4 Lechoń J., *Bez odpowiedzi*, [in:] idem, *Poezje zebrane*, ed. Loth R., Torun 1995, p. 444.

5 Such romantic creation is present not only in Lechoń's poetry. The plot of his dramas (which are the parts of *Romantyczność* triptych) takes place in the historical space: "Noc letnia, najbardziej romantyczna, lejąca z nieba srebrny księżyc i gwiazdy na park stary i na dwór, który stoi na wzgórzu — jak wszystkie inne dwory w Polsce"; see: Lechoń J., *Kwiat pomarańczowy*, [in:] idem, *Fragmenty dramatyczne*, Warsaw 1978, p. 7.

6 Lechoń J., [\*\*\* *W złotych strzępach liści drzewa nocą stoją...*], [in:] idem, *Poezje zebrane*, op. cit., p. 39.

7 Lechoń J., *Ojców*, [in:] ibidem, p. 147.

a hand of his master visible in it<sup>8</sup>. Kazimierz Wierzyński remembered an enchantment which was accompanying the reception of Lechoń's debut:

napisany ręką geniusza wtedy, gdy największym utrapieniem pisarstwa bywają jeszcze błędy ortograficzne<sup>9</sup>.

Wierzyński pointed out emotional tension of this volume, its ideational content and its fugue. He concluded:

Stoimy przed pięknem bez skazy, które nie potrzebuje żadnych dopełnień<sup>10</sup>.

Wiktor Weintraub recognised that Lechoń erupted straightaway as a great, brilliant, fully-fledged talent and thereby win a position of the great poet<sup>11</sup>.

According to Sakowski, that was the moment from which Lechoń has been considered as the successor of great poets of the Romantic period. Great expectations which appeared then were consistent with his ambition but they frightened him as well which caused he passed over in silence for a while. What is more, Sakowski stated that if the next Lechoń's volume, *Srebrne i czarne*,

napisał kto inny, można by uznać, że to świetne osiągnięcie poetyckie, ale Lechoń tak zaostrzył wymagania, że oczekiwano od niego nie osiągnięć, lecz objawień<sup>12</sup>.

Since then Lechoń used to compare his works to the works of the great poets and wonder if he would be able to work for 'a good necrology' and 'interment on Skalka'<sup>13</sup>.

At that time he was feeling like Słowacki, in whom his mother wanted to see an alter ego of him:

Właściwie więc — myślałem sobie, czy to wypada Słowackiemu, czy Słowacki mógłby tak postąpić<sup>14</sup>.

8 Sakowski J., Żalobny pas lity, [in:] *Pamięci Lechonia*, London 1958, p. 3.

9 Wierzyński K., *O poezji Lechonia*, [in:] ibidem, p. 55.

10 Ibidem, p. 58.

11 Weintraub W., *Karmazynowe i czarne*, [in:] ibidem, p. 74.

12 Sakowski J., op. cit., p. 6, 7.

13 "Michał Anioł miał 37 lat, gdy namalował plafon sykstyński. Nie mam się za Michała Anioła — ale trzeba sobie raz po raz powtarzać: «A ty?»"; Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, ed. Loth R., vol. I, Warsaw 1992, p. 351. Journal entry from 18 VII 1950.

14 Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 527. Journal entry from 5 IX 1952.

The statement above is crucial for considering Lechoń's work and life. His remarkable debut and the pressure — of himself, his mother and the recipients of his literary work — was so high that it determined his personality. If we add his innate, inherited from his mother, tendency to neurasthenia we can see a view of a complicated person and writer. His complicated mental condition probably triggered the suicide attempt (Lechoń took a very large dose of Veronal) which took place in 1921, when he was still at the top of the tree. Considering that after taking the medicine he managed to wake up his brother and tell him what he did (he also shared information about his expectations regarding the funeral and his last will), we can suppose that this suicide attempt was the most likely his cry for help or attempting to attract someone's attention.

As I have already mentioned, Lechoń was interested in literature and the great Polish tradition since he was a very young man. Among those interest, he had his favourites, Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, the great writers of romanticism. Because of his obsessive adoration for the past Lechoń lived in the real world only physically, his mind were somewhere else, in the world of faded props and ivy-clad graves. He perceived his present through the past and he thought that we can found our way in the present and built the future only by being immersed in the past. What he valued most was the classic literature represented by the great writers of the Romantic era. In his opinion this literature was the space where the Polish tradition has spoken fully and the most beautifully. Lechoń considered *Pan Tadeusz* as Polish classic masterpiece of the writing art, which was born in the times when Polish tradition has fully grown. In his opinion Mickiewicz

wziął na siebie przeszłość całej Polski. Jeszcze w *Grażynie* i *Wallenrodzje* wią-  
żą go różne gusty i przesady romantyczne, zanim wszystko stanie się nim,  
Mickiewiczem, w którym zamknął się duch polski, rozmarzony i burzliwy,  
związany w klasyczne więzy swej kultury<sup>15</sup>.

Reading of Lechoń's considerations regarding Polish literature let us understand his commitment to the past:

Mickiewicz pokazuje nam (...), że nowość i tradycje nie są ze sobą sprzeczne,  
ale że przeciwnie, największe przewroty literackie czynili ci właśnie, którzy  
wchłonawszy w siebie przeszłość, znaleźli przez to instynktowną miarę no-  
wości. Mówi nam on, że kto nie jest związany z przeszłością, nie jest związa-  
ny z niczym i żadnej prawdziwej nowości nie osiągnie<sup>16</sup>.

15 Lechoń J., *Tradycja i nowość w literaturze polskiej*, [in:] idem, *O literaturze polskiej*, Warsaw 1993, p. 14.

16 Ibidem.

Moreover, according to Lechoń, Mickiewicz was more valid than Lechoń's current, young and popular writers who, in his opinion, were not able to express their era as they were not living in any<sup>17</sup>. He claimed that Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Fryderyk Chopin, Stanisław Wyspiański, Antoni Młodecki and Ignacy Mochański, who all managed to write their masterpieces before being forty, were geniuses, while his generation did not know such talents. Lechoń stated that Czesław Miłosz would probably never write his masterpiece, especially after his forties: "Można być pewnym, że nie napisze go nigdy" ("One can be pretty sure that he will never manage to write it")<sup>18</sup>.

In June of 1927 Lechoń took part in moving the remains of Juliusz Słowacki to Poland. Formerly, he was also present (as the delegate of the PEN Club) in Paris during the exhumation of the remains<sup>19</sup>. He amazed his colleagues by his solemn gesture of keeping guard despite of being cold and tired. Lechoń's memory of those events is very touching, he named himself and Artur Oppman, his companion, "niegodnymi, ale wiernymi pogrobowcami romantycznej poezji" ("unworthy but faithful epigones of the romanticism")<sup>20</sup>. The memory of those event was also prevented by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who wrote:

mogli się wszyscy przekonać, jak intensywnie ten człowiek przeżywał wszystko, co miało coś wspólnego z poezją. Pogrzeb Słowackiego nadzarpnął jego zdrowie<sup>21</sup>.

Lechoń was drawing attention by his appearance almost during his all adult life (while he was living in Warsaw as well as while he was living in the New York City), his hat and frock coat became his identification. He used such classic identifications also in his poetry, when he was writing about the great Poles and statesmen of the Romantic period. In his poems he was referring to: Słowacki's *Grób Agamemnona*, *Anhelli*, *Balladyna*, *Benionowski*; *Fantazy* and *Sen srebrny Salomei*; Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and *Dziady*; Zygmunt Krasiński's *Irydion* and *Nie-Boska komedia* and to other great writers such as Johann Goethe, Georg Byron, William Shakespeare and Cyprian Kamil

17 Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 623. Journal entry from 31 XII 1953.

18 Ibidem, vol. I, p. 385. Journal entry from 7 I 1952. Miłosz was in his forties then.

19 See *Włosy Słowackiego* poem. Lechoń gave speeches during the funerals of many great Poles and during the funeral of Stefan Żeromski (23 XI 1925) he carried the Order of Polonia Restituta in front of Żeromski's coffin. As he expressed in one of his poem, he felt he was the representative of the whole nation then: "Gdy wszyscy powoli rozchodzą się z cmentarza/ I tylko jeden człowiek zostaje przy grobie"; Lechoń J., *B-moli*, [in:] idem, *Poezje zebrane*, op. cit., p. 97–98.

20 Lechoń J., *Polska Słowackiego i Chopina* "Wiadomości" 1949, no. 32, p. 1.

21 Iwaszkiewicz J., *Lechoń*, [in:] idem, *Aleja przyjaciół*, Warsaw 1984, p. 45.

Norwid and he mentioned: Jan Kiliński, Józef Poniatowski, Józef Piłsudski (Lechoń treated him with the great respect), Dante, Marcel Proust, Stefan Starzyński, Tadeusz Kościuszko, Jan Matejko, Jan Kazimerz, Józef Chelmoński and Plato.

Those figures and their history were used by Lechoń as the props which were helping him to paint the picture of national thrills and complaints expressed by a lyrical narrator (individual or collective one). Lechoń's poems are very strict in the field of their form and ideas they represent and very intensive in the emotional field. The writer enjoyed basing on stereotypes in his works, he liked ornamenting his poetic world with some kind of keepsakes:

Wszystkie słowa podniosłe, któreś znalazł ze szkoły,  
Muzyka starych pieśni, wolności anioły,  
Książkę Józef na koniu, wiszący nad biurkiem,  
I olbrzymi Batory w malej czapce z piórkiem,  
I młodzieniec z Grottgera, co żegna swą miłą,  
Pocztówka z białym orłem — wszystko to ożyło<sup>22</sup>.

Lechoń affirmed Polish myths, the language and the emotional emphasis of the Romantic period. He was the poet and the Pole, and in his poetry we can find two coexisting topics — individual one and national one. His intimate feeling, thrills, emotions were marked with his patriotism and respect for Polish tradition. Those were the patterns followed by him to the end of his life. His poems preserve the memory of the great Poles, his lyrical narrator appears as a poet of the Romantic era and a rhetorician — he calls his readers in dialogue parts, questions, apostrophes, he also raises difficult matters of intricacies of the human soul. Thereby, Lechoń becomes much alike Mickiewicz who could say “Ja i ojczyzna to jedno” (“Me and my fatherland is the same”). In Lechoń's opinion:

Żaden z twórców przed Mickiewiczem nie miał prawa tak powiedzieć. Był w nim sąd dusz polskich, przejmował i wstrząsał naród, niósł pociechę, nadzieję i prorocstwo wolności. Gdy czytamy *Dziady* i *Pana Tadeusza*, dochodzi do głosu wszystko, co stanowi naszą niepowtarzalną odrębność, nasza wzniosłość i słabość zostają wstrząśnięte<sup>23</sup>.

Lechoń's attitude to Mickiewicz resembles a cult based on the indisputable dogma. The author of *Karmażynowy poemat* was doing exegesis of Mic-

22 Lechoń J., *Legenda*, [in:] idem, *Poezje*, op. cit., p. 74. Lechoń was an enthusiast of literary ornament, he was enchanted to read *Pan Tadeusz* in which everything “jest zarazem symbolem i ornamentem”; see: idem, *Dziennik*, vol. II, p. 13. Journal entry from 7 I 1951.

23 Lechoń J., *Tradycja i nowość w literaturze polskiej*, [in:] idem, op. cit., p. 11.

kiewicz's works, he also thought that copying Polish writer of the Romantic era is not a discredit:

Nawet dobre kopiowanie Mickiewicza nie jest służbą według jego myśli. Myśleć tak odważnie, z taką nowością — jak on wtedy. Oto zadanie<sup>24</sup>.

For Lechoń Mickiewicz was the most outstanding Polish writer, whose life marked the beginning of the modern era of literature and the history of the Polish nation:

Mickiewicz stoi właściwie pośrodku zagadnień, które będą nas tu szczególnie zajmowały, w nim właśnie zawarte jest zgodzone z niedościgną harmonią piękno wszystkiego, co było zawsze w duszy polskiej, co było dziedzictwem historii i dawnej poezji, z największym porywem do nowości, do przemiany; w jego poezji, w jego dziele politycznym, w jego życiu nawet zamyka się zagadka tradycji i nowości. I stoi on na przelomie między piśmiennictwem przedrobiorowym a całą po nim literaturą polską jako nieprzewyższony szczyt jej powagi, nie tylko jej patosu<sup>25</sup>, jej znaczenia, jej niezbędności dla narodu, jej związku z narodem, jej prawdziwej polskości<sup>26</sup>.

Lechoń was well known for his radical opinions. He suffered and got angry when his work did not amaze the audience, he could not stand a polemic, every polemical debater became his eternal enemy. He cared for other's opinion only if 'other' meant the posterity. This is why he tried to compensate the years of stagnancy and he complained in his diary when he spent a day without writing. Such day was a waste for him. There was also another group of his antagonist — those who did not share his literary fascinations with Mickiewicz, Żeromski, Staff and Krasiński (Lechoń considered him a the 'third of the great prophets'<sup>27</sup> of Polish Romanticism). Unfortunately, many of Lechoń's statements cannot be defended or justified. His judges are very emotional and subjective. His attempts to narrow the valuable literature only to the works which somehow refers to Mickiewicz literary work could be treated with the indulgent smile, irritation or they can just embarrass Lechoń. Despite of that the author of *Karmazynowy poemat* considered Mickiewicz as the legendary of the nation:

24 Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 60. Journal entry from 26 IX 1949.

25 Lechoń's poems were full of pathos which was one of the poet's favourite way of expression. Lechoń used pathos like his master, Mickiewicz, had done before. In his opinion the great improvisation of Conrad was: "najpotężniejszym w poezji całego świata wybuchem romantycznego patosu i wspaniałym popisem (...) romantycznej strofy"; *ibidem*, p. 138.

26 Lechoń J., *Tradycja i nowość w literaturze polskiej*, [in:] *idem*, op. cit., p. 11.

27 Lechoń admired Mickiewicz as well as some other writers and he had the great respect for them. However, when someone insult him in some way, he was able to be unkind and unfair. He wrote about Magaczewski: "jego wiersze są puste jak stodoła na przednówku"; see: Sakowski J. op. cit., p. 5.

Mickiewicz wykańcza odrębność duszy polskiej (...). Wpływ jego nie jest tylko wpływem pisarza, ale wpływem nauczyciela, przywódcy, który nie tylko tak kształtował swój naród, jak Dante naród włoski, albo wielka plejada siedemnastowieczną Francję, ale — zaważył na ideologii narodu polskiego, na jego stylu duchowym, jak żadna inna przed nim postać historyczna z wyjątkiem jednego Kościuszki<sup>28</sup>.

Lechoń claimed that Mickiewicz was “Bachem pięciolinii polskiej mowy” (“Sebastian Bach of the staff of Polish language”) and the creator of the model of a protagonist who was able to sacrifice his own happiness for the greater good and who wakes up the spirit of a nation and makes a rebel to set a will of freedom. And this will was, in Lechoń’s opinion, the point in which Mickiewicz managed to reunite the country and the emigration.

According to Sakowski, Lechoń “to Słowacki, który chciałby być Mickiewiczem” (“is Słowacki who wishes to be Mickiewicz”)<sup>29</sup>. It can be said that the fortunes of Lechoń and Mickiewicz were similar at many points. And this is not a coincidence or fate but the result of Lechoń’s attempts to make himself similar to Mickiewicz. Tymon Terlecki has reasonably noticed that:

Mickiewicz był freudowskim “super-ego” Lechonia — ideałem, na którego podobieństwo człowiek chciałby ukształtować siebie, miarą którą sobie sam wyznacza, instancją, która go bezlitośnie sądzi z niedostępnych wyżyn<sup>30</sup>.

Lechoń’s desire to imitate or even copy Mickiewicz included not only his literary work but also his behaviour. No matter where he was — in Warsaw, Paris or New York — he hung around with the political, artistic and business establishment, he boast about his contacts, he enjoyed being a guest of the big galas and he liked to be the host of them as well. He loved the hierarchy, which was for him the way of perceiving the world and assessing people and events. Lechoń divided everything into *sacrum* and *profanum*. He created a mystical, ceremonial world, while every-day reality was tiring and destructive for him. He despised everything what was not exalted or elite. He was attached to the costume, he always looked like a person who is about to step on stage. He wanted so hard to perfectly play his role that he actually did not exist behind it. He felt badly without the ceremony and

28 Lechoń J., *Tradycja i nowość w literaturze polskiej*, op. cit., p. 118, 150, 160. As we can read in Lechoń’s journal: “Mickiewicz to nie tylko największy poeta całego naszego narodu — to także nasz, wygnańców, starszy brat, nasz nieszczęsny ojciec w wygnaniu i tęsknocie”; zob. Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, vol. III, op. cit., p. 613. Journal entry from 30 IV 1955.

29 Sakowski J., op. cit., p. 4.

30 Terlecki T., *Dwa profile Jana Lechonia*, [in:] *Pamięci Lechonia*, op. cit., p. 24.



pose. He wanted to either be the great, national poet or not to be at all — his suicide proved that he was very serious in that matter.

Lechoń understood why Mickiewicz had stopped writing being only thirty six years old. He claimed that Mickiewicz after creating

mitu narodowego zdolnego do ciągłego życia i odradzania się w duszy polskiej (...), miał prawo uważać swoje zadanie za skończone<sup>31</sup>.

Such opinion was not only the result of Lechoń's admiration for *Pan Tadeusz* and *Dziady* but also a form of an autotherapy for the poet who after a brilliant debut suffered a sort of creative impotence. After analysing the history of Mickiewicz's love to Maryla Wereszczakówna, Lechoń reached a conclusion that the women would marry Mickiewicz if he only wished that happen. He concluded:

zdaje się, że uciekł on po prostu od szczęścia w to nieszczęście, które mu dało pełnię wypowiedzenia się.<sup>32</sup>

Lechoń's poems also have their origins in misery. Being fifty years old he was recalling Warsaw like it had been in his youth, his young friends and his deceased parents. Some of this recalls reminds us his origins, his early fascinations and writings:

Dziś rano naszło mnie cierpienie duszy tak dotkliwe, że rady dać sobie nie mogłem. W radio grano *Noc petersburską* Rubinsteina, która przypomniała mi zamierzchłe czasy, wakacje u mojego wuja Jana Niewęgłowskiego w Komorowie (...) i moje wtedy dziecinne rozpacz bez powodu, od których zaczęły się moje wiersze. Taką samą rozpacz czulem teraz, czulem ból przejmujący rozłąki z tymi, co odeszli, żal za przeszłością i nie do ukojenia poczucie grzechu.<sup>33</sup>

The fully-fledged Lechoń noticed the similarity between his current mental condition and his mind state from the youth age. He did not hide that he suffered from neurasthenia and he took "vitamins" prescribed by his doctor. He tried to take his mind over control but at the end of his life he felt he lost this fight. At that time he was searching for his friends help and he was trying to find a relief in prayer<sup>34</sup>. Lechoń's oversensitivity was not the only source of his depression and anxiety. From about a half of

31 Lechoń J., *Tradycja i nowość w literaturze polskiej*, op. cit., p. 143.

32 Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 93. Journal entry from 21 X 1949.

33 Ibidem, p. 80. Journal entry from 22 III 1951.

34 Especially the last volume of Lechoń's journal includes many entries regarding his intense, trustful prayers. "Módl się i pracuj" ('Pray and work') — Lechoń, believing that only God and writing could saved him, ended every day with this statement. See also Św. Antoni poem.

20. of the XX century he was suffering from recurring creative stagnancy. As it has been mentioned before, this stagnancy was caused by Lechoń's ambition to write something more magnificent than *Karmazynowy poemat*. Even a work as good as his highest achievement would not be enough for Lechoń. He desired to be better and better, he wanted something extraordinary, he wished to exceed the boundaries of human possibilities. What's more, Mickiewicz, his former guiding light, eventually became his demon, a reason for his autodestruction and his tragic end.

A sense of nonsense as growing in Lechoń while he was living in the New York City. He was in exile but he was aware of his motherland's tragic situation. He was a poor refugee and he was suffering because of his complicated emotional states. All of these caused that Lechoń was feeling like the tragic, Romantic hero with a dramatic fate, chased by the sinister Furies<sup>35</sup>. He was trying to find a delight in Mickiewicz's history by finding the parallels between their fates. He thought that the Polish prophet had been being seduced by the devil and he had eventually surrendered. In Lechoń's opinion Mickiewicz was afraid of the eternal damnation and this fear can be noticed in each part of *Dziady*<sup>36</sup>.

The hero of Lechoń's poems written in the New York City is the Romantic hero suffering because of his tragic fate and also because of the dramatic fate of the world. Such hero is the *porte-parole* of the poet. Lechoń revealed himself in the *Erynie* poem, in which he abandoned his favourite literary disguise and let the reader enter his soul, his intimacy, his pain. Such literary strategy can be associated with a kind of an examination of conscience before death or the Final Judgement.

"Being confirmed in the form"<sup>37</sup> (the term after Wojciech Wyskiel) is the key expression for recognising the creative identity of the author of *Srebrne i czarne*. While living and working in Poland (till the end of 20. of XX century) the anachronism of his poetics view attracted readers attention. He was different from the rest of his literary group (Skamander) but he aroused interest and admiration. He was trying to keep such situation going also when he was in exile. He tried to "furnish" Paris and New York in the Polish way by gathering together the people who wanted to be helpful and admired him. Moreover, he was an active participant of the cultural life<sup>38</sup>, he was an editor of Polish perio-

35 "Przez ostatnie lata myślałem, że już nie będę nigdy taki, jak jestem teraz — to znaczy, że nie będę czuł się tak jak przed trzydziestu laty. I jestem znów zagubiony, sam i przekonany, że poza pisaniem nie istnieje i nie warto, żebym istniał"; see: Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, vol. I, op. cit., p. 84. Journal entry from 15 X 1949; see also: Urbańska M., "Udawac do końca". *Dziennik Jana Lechońa jako świadectwo*, Łódź 2010.

36 Lechoń J., *Dziennik*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 420. Journal entry from 22 IV 1952.

37 Wyskiel W., *Kregi wygnania. Jan Lechoń na obczyźnie*, Cracow 1988, on many pages.

38 Sakowski mentioned that Lechoń was always a good speaker and was able to attract attention of the wide audience: "Swoim chrypliwym, zdartym głosem mówił z pamięci najpiękniejsze polskie

dicals, an organiser of discussions, a participant of radio plays and a co-worker of Polish diaspora<sup>39</sup>. He was writing never completed prose (like *Bal u senatora*) and a diary. However, his life was like living in a reservation, an existence under artificial conditions. Lechoń ignored the fact that everything, including literary styles and tastes, was changing. He could not stand contemporary literature. Living in his own, “parallel” world, he ignored or even depreciated poets like Miłosz or Witold Gombrowicz. In his diary he was mentioning the funerals of his colleagues from the old Warsaw literary “guard” he once belonged.

Lechoń was more and more alienated, which eventually caused the disintegration of the form mentioned at the beginning of the previous paragraph. Notes from the last volume of his diary in which the poet was persuading himself to save his face, to pretend till the same end point out that firstly, Lechoń could not see his future and was thinking out the end and secondly, they show that he had trouble with staying in the form. The phrase “pretending till the end” should be then understand as “staying in the form”. It does not mean to lie or fake but to masquerade, to wear a mask of the Romantic hero. Lechoń drilled himself to play his role till the end. Although he did not accept that the world and values in it was changing, he was thinking about changing reality, about the fact that myths which we all create eventually would not matter:

Szczytne cnoty, dla których gwarny świat nas chwali,  
Czyny, których przykładem przyszłość ma się ćwiczyć,  
I nasz honor kamienny i wola ze stali  
Na Sądzie Ostatecznym nie będą się liczyć.

Opadną z nas, pokryte przez tłum oklaski,  
Uczynki miłosierne, co sławę nam szerzą,  
I tylko pozostaną te mroki i blaski,  
O których nikt z nas nie wie, czy od nas zależą<sup>40</sup>.

Such thinking turned out to be only a flash. Lechoń did not take off the masque of the Romantic hero. He eventually refuse to live and he chose the

wiersze w sposób jedyny i nieporównywalny, tłumiąc spazm wzruszenia, którym napelniał go każdy cud sztuki i natury — objawienie «rzeczy niepojętych», Sakowski J., op. cit., p. 76.

39 Lechoń was an editor in “Tygodnik Polski”, he cooperated with Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, Association of Writers from Poland (Koło Pisarzy z Polski), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, National Committee of Americans of Polish Extraction and Polish Theatre of Artists.

40 Lechoń J., *Sąd ostateczny*, [in:] idem, *Poezje zebrane*, op. cit., p. 123. See also: *Poniedziałek*: “Do domu idę w księżycowej smudze,  
Ale to nie jest mój dom, ja wiem;  
Bóg jak do Pawła powie do mnie:  
«Twoje życie jest snem,  
I ja cię z niego obudzę»; Lechoń J., *Poniedziałek*, [in:] ibidem, p. 179.

death and “saving his face”. His tragedy was a tragedy of the great Romantic hero<sup>41</sup>. Lechoń knew that his alienation is no longer admirable but caricatural or even grotesque. he also knew that he would probably never come back to his beloved fatherland and his waiting would never pay off, his dream would never come true<sup>42</sup> — being far from home he was only a refugee. He could not do anything about all of this because any action would be for him a denial of his existence. This is how he became a prisoner of the once shaped form.

The year of 1955 was named by the Lechoń the year of Mickiewicz. The poet organised many literary events, that time it was his life purpose. It also was his last great task which he managed to lead to the successful end. Even the Lechoń's suicide makes a significant parallel between his life and the life of Mickiewicz. Lechoń died nearly exactly a hundred years after the great Polish prophet having 56 years (Mickiewicz died at the exact same age). The poet stayed loyal to his credo expressed in the one of his poems:

Wokół tylko trwogi i troski tak liczne,  
Ale ty się nie buntuj przeciw przeznaczeniu:  
Spokojnie pisz do końca swoje wiersze klasyczne,  
Które wtedy są dobre, gdy cierpisz w milczeniu<sup>43</sup>.

Pojąłem, że to prawda, że wszystko skończone.<sup>44</sup>

41 See also another poems of Lechoń, for instance *Erynie*: “Rozsządziłem siebie i jak Edyp oczy/ wrywam z siebie serce rękami własnymi”,

“To mojego dzieciństwa jarzębiny krwiste

I te już nie noszone szale powłóczyście,

I owo romantyczne głowy pochylenie,

O którym nie ma mowy już nawet na scenie”; Lechoń J., *Erynie*, [in:] ibidem, p. 189.

42 During the anniversary celebrated in 1948 Lechoń said: “I ja mam też dla was życzenia. Te, którymi łączymy się wszyscy rozrzuceni po świecie, których wspomnienie jawi nam się w marzeniach sennych, bez których spełnienia ciężko by nam było żyć i za okropnie umierać. Tam, gdzie stoją teraz gruzy Warszawy, gdzie teraz noc zachodzi nad domami naszego dzieciństwa — spotkajmy się kiedyś wszyscy. Tam jest początek, kres i cel naszej drogi, tam jest odpłata, zrozumienie i przebaczenie (...)”; see: *Przemówienie Jana Lechońa*, “Wiadomości” 1948 no. 24, p. 3.

Lechoń had to wait for the grave in his fatherland till 1991. He was buried in Laski near Warsaw, next to his parents and brother. Formerly his grave had been situated in Calvary, Queens, New York.

In *Rozmowa z Aniołem* poem an angel feels sorry for the poem's lyrical subject who dies alone, far away from his fatherland. Then the lyrical subject ripostes:

“«— Daleko? Co ty mówisz? Mnie wszystkie zapachy

Ogrodów i pól naszych co dzień niosą wiatry,

We mnie, we mnie jest wszystko: mazowieckie piachy

I jeziora litewskie, i Wisła i Tatry”; see: Lechoń J., *Rozmowa z Aniołem*, [in:] idem, *Poezje*, op. cit., p. 192.

43 Lechoń J., *Jabłka i astry*, [in:] ibidem, p. 97.

44 Lechoń J., *Wieczór w Salamance*, [in:] ibidem, p. 79.

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