

To live up to sanctity, one must first become a saint. As we follow Leszek Serafinowicz's life story, it is hard to resist the impression that these were the stakes of his internal struggle. Perhaps the psychasthenia-afflicted poet was ultimately too weak and too mortal to defeat his inner demons, but he never renounced classical beauty, in which he perceived a reflection of God.

Certain parts of this biography are obscured, entwined in the vines of falsehoods, half-truths, illusions, phantasms and dreams. Other parts are illuminated with the blinding light of the sacred, expressed in Polishness and poetry, and ultimately through religion. Finally, there is the man himself: hot or cold, but never lukewarm.

Lechoń was never alone on the stage where his drama played out. He was accompanied by angels: those loyal to the Creator, and the fallen angels – career litigants. To some extent, he himself was not of this world. He resembled a seraph-become-human whose incarnation was never complete. As Lechoń wrote in his diaries, “[...] I had always felt as if I had fallen to Earth from another planet. Despite all my sensations of reality, I truly am Jean Lechoń de la lune [French: Jan Lechoń from the Moon]” (*Dziennik II*, p. 230).

If, at the Last Judgment, the author of *Marble and the Rose* were to be judged according to the law, the outcome would likely resemble that of the test he took to receive American citizenship: denunciation and, in the best case, termination of the proceedings. But he believed in mercy. Two weeks after the poet's New York funeral, the Polish primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, under house arrest in Komańcza, wrote to Zygmunt Serafinowicz:

“I have said holy mass for the poet Jan Lechoń, and I calmly trust that the Good Lord will increase his fortunes sevenfold, as he did for Job. After all, he once allowed a foe to strike Job's body, but gave him no right to his soul. Let us trust that his soul escaped the terrible ordeal of life with a longing for the True Father”.

Most poets leave nothing to future generations but their works and polished biographies. But there are also those who, after their death, become heroes of the collective consciousness. Stanisław Baliński was right in predicting that “Lechoń, his wonderful poems, the vicissitudes of his life, and his love of Poland would give rise to a legend [...]” The legend typically centres around the poet's various personal dramas, but its fullest version assumes a social dimension. It is the story of the angelic, militant and creative Poland that Lechoń carried inside him on the roads of exile. His tragic death essentially marked the end of the “indomitable” émigré milieu, the last bastion of the Second Polish Republic, but his ideals never lost a bit of their brilliance. “Was

he the last Romantic?” Jan Fryling mused in 1957. “Or should we think of him as the John the Baptist of a new Romanticism, one who will assuredly emerge like a blue island from sea of blood mixed with mud.”

Matarnia, 8 June 2021

Excerpt translated by Arthur Barys



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**WOJCIECH  
WENCEL**

Born 1972

*Lechoń. Rycerz i faun. Biografia poety*  
[Jan Lechoń: Knight and Faun]

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#### Selected poetry collections

*Polonia aeterna*, 2018  
*Epigonia*, 2016  
*De profundis*, 2010  
*Podziemne motyle*, 2010  
*Imago mundi. Poemat*, 2005  
*Ziemia Święta*, 2002  
*Oda na dzień św. Cecylii*, 1997

#### Selected essay collections

*Przepis na arcydzieło. Szkice literackie*, 2003  
*Zamieszkać w katedrze. Szkice o kulturze i literaturze*, 1999

#### Biographies

*Wierzyński. Sens ponad klęską. Biografia poety* [Wierzyński: Sense Beyond Catastrophe. A Biography of the Poet], 2020

#### Foreign language translations

Wojciech Wencel's poetry collections have been published in Russia and Ukraine. His poems have also been translated into Czech, German, Spanish, and Serbian (published in anthologies).  
*Wierzyński: Sense Beyond Catastrophe. A Biography of the Poet* was published in English in 2021.

#### Selected awards

Totus Tuus Award (2011) – nomination  
Franciszek Karpiński Award (2011)  
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Award (2011), nominations in 2006, 2003, 2002  
Kościelski Foundation Award (2000)  
Nike Literary Award (1997) – nomination