



CZECHOWICZ
A POEM ABOUT LUBLIN





ASSOCIATION OF POLISH WRITERS

In te 70th anniversary
of the poet's death





Józef Czechowicz

A POEM
ABOUT LUBLIN

Translated by
Małgorzata Sady
& George Hyde



Na mieniu jurekbat klaszary korynck
na drugie, z zegar meit.
Cimur jol, cimur gogskat
w atole obienka:
gniazdy, kumy.

Lublin nad tola pragnad.
Sam byt -
i cisza,



Dołota
pagorow kota,
dynisza czarnozemnu gotac.

Mgły nad sadami czarnemi.
Z nad toli mgły.
Zamknęły się oczy ziemi
poniekami z mgły.

Ne moge nie słyszeć korynck, które zbliżają, wschodowa ten
miasto wschodowemu. Szczytny polne pszczyk nabrzmienią
w drogi, a te znow waleńają się słowko wiosna jalistek
pół. Słowa na toczy. Koryncką się wiatr szumi w kłó-
dach. Potwice meoaleho, a jenero litoś wody ze studni
ciggnie. Korynck słyszeć. Jenero niejsko tu. Jenero niejsko
Korynck goni wiosna cimur. Mgła niednie.
Wschodowe, sto już kłóte nlicaki starego przedmieścia,
Wierianą. Zawmiej, gdy minnie opiaty le wagała,
nazymano je: Winiawa.
Tęże dżi nioży cieniami nider i zapadły w ziemi
domostw myśli, wschodowe, o tem tyłko, że miasto
kochane już cis ogarnia i tuli.

Ciemniej.
Pagory, zagaje, podłża
nie sygnia się mankami na oczy.
Ciemniej.
Z nieb celnici otwarti nacietaj
biegną, eiche niestwiednie nocy.

The first page of a manuscript of *A Poem*
about *Lublin*





On its tower a tin cock fluttered
another – bore a clock that hummed a tune.
The clouds' billowing wall shattered
into golden skylights:
stars, lamps.

Lublin crouched on its pasture.
All by itself –
with the silence.

All around
the steaming hilly ground,
black patches of land.

Over the black orchards mists.
From over the pastures mists.
The eyes of the earth have been closed
by the eyelids of mist.



In the mist you cannot hear the steps, which bring the Wanderer closer to his native town. Field paths bulge, swell into roads, and again they spread wide among billowing cornfields. The road rolls onwards. A gusty wind whistles in the ears of corn. Midnight is not far off, and someone is still drawing water from the well. You can hear the gantry. Still countrified here. Still countrified. The moon scurries through the clouds. The mist gets thinner.

O, Wanderer, already here are the winding streets of the old periphery, Wieniawa. In the old days when vineyards enveloped those hills, they were called Winiawa, or vine slopes.

Passing through the shadows of slums and dwellings sunken into the ground, o Wanderer, the only thing on your mind is that your beloved city has already embraced you and is giving you a hug.

It is getting darker.
Hillocks, brushwood, marshes
scatter no chaplets on your eyes.
It is getting darker.
From the abysses of heaven wide open
silent night-bears run.

Over the streets, in a row,
black, hairy,
they will roll over the houses until
the moon explodes from behind the clouds
[crater-like,
Tilting the world towards the light.

Roofs of tin rumble like drums.
Up, down, a pearly frieze
spreads unevenly:
a vertical gathering
lamplights of the periphery.

No much use against bears!
Under the paw of the silent dark,
little houses, inns, synagogues bow, crouch.
Oh! Low ceilings would surely crack!...
...but it has already grown brighter.

A landscape: Wieniawa and the moon.

O Wanderer, you have a companion. The full moon, silvery and distant, will lead you to the city of the dead where your nearest and dearest rest under the stones and turf. It will silver the old houses in the market square, reveal the ghosts of the castle church, finally it will take you into the fields along Szeroka, across the districts of Kalinowszczyzna and Czwartek.

It is the moon, your companion. Let poets call it: shield, silver dove, heavenly chariot. For you it is simply the moon. Perhaps even the moon of Twardowski, perhaps Saint George's. For the same moon was shining when your mother was telling an eight-year-old about Saint George fighting a dragon there. For it was here, in this town to which you return like a prodigal son.

The wind, the wind starts blowing again. Both he and the moon walk towards the graveyard. To the ancestors. And the wind carries distant voices from the towers of the city.

Clocks, long faces of night,
intone a password: mid – night, mid – night...
Down below
flaxen patches, patches of hemp,
streets – long skiffs of darkness,
tethered by the chains of lamps.



On the edge of Lublin a black rectangle
recites, rustling, a poem of the wind.
Birches, maples, chestnuts, cypresses
have colonised the island of the dead.

Hollow alleys mutter at night like a gutter.
The pale glitter of a solitary star leans against
[the shadow,
against ivy, mournful myrtle,
ferns.

Crosses of marble, bronze angels
stand guard sternly on the coffin breasts.

A cock crows.

Carve, engrave in your memory the inscription
[from the graveyard's gates:
„Behold in dust I sleep – and from dust
[I shall rise at the last day”...



Filled with sadness, lost in thought and oblivious to the world, the Wanderer walks through the town. And it is mute. Here and there in the high street late passers-by talking, here and there a gate bangs shut.

His steps fall on the cobble-stones mechanically, without significance. And still he walks along between very familiar walls. In the light of a street lamp the eyes of the pensive man could read the shop inscriptions. In this little corner shop they bought him a toy trumpet when he was little. In that corner he said good-bye to his mother and sister and went off to the front. And here is the house where he experienced his most gentle moments. A window is open on the second floor. Somebody is playing the piano.

Now it grows dark. Not because the moon has hidden itself in the clouds. You were embraced, o Wanderer, by the gloom of the Krakowska Gateway. Wake up, wake up and look around. In a moment you will enter the square.

Stones, stone buildings,
walls, dark and leaning.
The moon is low and rolls along the steep roof.
Wait. Let's wait for a while –
like a pearl
it will fall out into the bowl of the market place –
the bowl will resound.

In the flaxen night,
in the seclusion of deep niches
in the frames of windows and gates
fractured,
powerless,
violet shadow will fall to its knees.

Yellow stars, scythed by flaming July,
fly – in a whirling cloud – fly,
rumple the firmament into golden trails,
behind the Law Court
glitter on the blind window panes
with a silent shot.

The summer night patiently waits,
will the moon fly down, resound,
will it go down Grodzka street?
It diffuses silverly
in the morning dew, in the scent of herbs.

How beautiful!



Well, it is still a long way to sunrise, although in July daybreaks come so early. You can stand here longer and breathe in the nocturnal charms.

Market Square. Here is the Acerna house, there a house belonging to the Sobieskis. And here is a corner house with stone lions. It is where you went to school. You remember it, for how could you not remember! It was just here and not somewhere else that you experienced your first moment of poetry listening to the old town in the evening.

Transform a memory into a verse. The very notions, memory and poetry, are so close to each other.



— |
— |

This is the verse:

The sky changes, though the evening has
[not subsided,
the wind still whispers before fading away.
The sky rustles in purple.
The wind – no longer a wind – a smile.

From the street of the Dominicans
[a choral song
girlish voices praising the Virgin.
Counterpoint from the street of the Archdeacon:
the sound of a solitary violin.

Music in the hush of the houses
Linked with the rainbow arches
falls with a shaft of light
onto the church forehead, like a curl.

And now someone has stretched the silence,
hitting it with a fist of bronze.
An evening toll
dripping with the strength of metal
under the church cross begins playing
[its song:

one – and two – and three – – –



Wanderer, now only the moon and houses,
the wind and churches, the stars and holes
of the streets. You walk and walk, pass still
another gate, climb up the side-streets of
the castle approaches, you stop before a low
archway. The arch is grated, above it glitter
fasces and battle-axes! You passed the grating,
court-yards and went by the foot of Duke
Daniel's tower.

You are in the castle chapel. Kneel down. It is
a hoard of treasure and the heart of Lublin,
a Jagiellonian city.



In a church window the moonlight flashed flat
as in standing water light.

In the dark interior the trail of whitish sheens.
You don't know what the name of
[its colour means.

A moving corridor of light
glides, glides in the dark
as if the blue night was moving its silver finger
along the attenuations of the Gothic arches
along the frescoes.

As when a child reading traces a line with his finger...



These painted rocks are the throne of the Virgin,
while elsewhere is the double dark image
[of Christ Byzantine
into two chalices pouring wine.

Hermit saints, the Virgin Mary so stern,
flowers streaming from the niches, recesses, doorframe,
bright-armed archangel – what is your radiant dream?
What apocalypses do eagles and dragons dream?

No trumpet calls.

In the darkness of the church the moon retracts
[its fingers.

Behind the window Orion glitters.





Once there were wonders and visions. They passed, everything became ordinary and common. Only that moon...

Perhaps the time has come for you to leave. Go down Zamkowa into the shadows of side-streets, then emerge from the darkness into Szeroka which really is wide. And from there, along sleepy alleyways, your feet will move of their own accord, nocturnal Wanderer, into the wide world. Leave the walls you know so well from the old days, when you ran after a little wooden wheel, and stared enchanted at the thronging Corpus Christi procession, when every Christmas night was more silvery than in any fairy-tale.

And now?

Those people are not there any longer, that time has passed away. O, Wanderer, a shadow accompanies you as always and the night is bathed in a silvery afterglow. Leave this town light-hearted, the way it greeted you.



The weather vane sings on the roof,
like a spider one pale star creeps.
Street lamps twinkle
in the dark swaying trees.

A warm aroma oozes from bakeries,
and silence from unopened doors.
If not for the barking of a dog
[on the peripheries,
You would have been – unutterably – alone.

Alone, or perhaps with a little stream,
running with no sound.
Though on such a bright azure night
it also – the darling of the sky –
from twilight through to the first light
is destined to sigh
shut in by walls...



Good night old town, good night. White roads
lead north from here, narrow into paths, paths
into the streamlets of paths. The Wanderer
is only a dark point on one of them.

He has disappeared behind the hill.

Good night, town,
good night...







NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Lublin, its setting and its architecture, are themes which play a powerful part in the work of Józef Czechowicz, a writer with organic ties to the town of his birth, his young manhood, and his earliest initiation into literature.

In his own lifetime he was shrouded in legend and considered the undisputed leader of his generation. His output was considered to be outstanding and Czesław Miłosz reckoned him among the greatest artists of the inter-war period. Czechowicz's work, which now belongs among the classics of Polish literature, has exerted a continuous influence on generations of writers.

The poet was born on March 15th. 1903, the youngest of the three children of Małgorzata Sułek and Paweł Czechowicz. His parents moved in from the country, and his father worked in a bank as a caretaker. In 1913 Józef began elementary school, which lasted until 1917. He went on to the Teacher Training College. For a few months in 1920 he took part as a volunteer in the Polish-Soviet War. When he returned from the front he worked in schools in the east of the Polish Republic. In 1926 he got work in a special school in Lublin, then became its director.

He made his literary debut in the monthly "Reflektor", publishing poetic prose in 1923. In 1927 his volume of poetry entitled *Kamień* (*Stone*) appeared, to critical acclaim. While studying in the Special Needs Educational Institute in 1928-1929 he started publishing in the Warsaw journals. In 1930 he published his second volume *Dzień jak Co Dzień* (*A Day Like Any Other*). The same year he went on a scholarship to France. In 1932 he published his *ballada z tamtej strony* (*ballad from over the border*) and in 1934

w błyskawicy (in a flash) and in collaboration with Franciszka Arnsztajn a book of poems about Lublin, entitled *Stare kamienie (Old Stones)*. In 1936 he published the volume *nic więcej (nothing more)* and in 1938 *Arkusz poetycki (a poetic quire)*, and in 1939 *nuta człowiecza (the sound of humanity)*.



In 1933 he moved permanently to Warsaw. From 1938 to the outbreak of war he worked in the editorial office of Polish Radio. These years saw plays, radio programmes, a lot of writing for children and numerous translations. He was the first to translate fragments of Joyce's *Ulysses* into Polish, as well as Eliot, Kipling, Whitman, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Seifert, Blok, Blake and many others. He also wrote essays and articles about the arts, and edited literary supplements for journals in Lublin and in Warsaw.

In 1934 he published his *Poemat o mieście Lublinie (A Poem about Lublin)*. It contained poetry linked to prose, together with a spoken supplement transmitted by Polish Radio.

When WW2 broke out Czechowicz returned to Lublin. He died on the 9th of September 1939 in a German air raid.

Ewa Łoś





Józef Czechowicz, *A Poem about Lublin*

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