

Introduction

*One of the greatest men od genius Poland has ever
brought forth [was] Stanisław Leśniewski.
Jan Łukasiewicz [2013].*

*Based on my lifetime of experience, I believe that
[Stanisław Leśniewski] was a man of genius:
the only man of genius who fate allowed me to encounter,
and once, that happened almost daily.
Tadeusz Kotarbiński [1958].*

1

The opinions of Jan Łukasiewicz and Tadeusz Kotarbiński cited above leave no doubts: Stanisław Leśniewski was an exceptional phenomenon in Polish culture.

In 2015, I published his *Collected Works* [Leśniewski 2015]. It is time to present his life story and personality, hitherto known mostly from “the handful of memories” of a few people who came into contact with him, with Kotarbiński as the first.

I began preparations for this biographical book on Leśniewski in the 1990s; with varying degrees of intensity, the work has lasted until today. I managed to reach many of Leśniewski’s family members and his wife Zofia Leśniewska’s, as well as people close to the Leśniewskis, have conversations with them, and collect unique iconographic documentation.

I would like to mention at this point (in alphabetical order) the people who I owe the most gratitude. These are: Dr. Mieczysław Brykczyński (the grandson of Leśniewski’s uncle, Ludwik), Danuta

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Jabłońska (the granddaughter of Leśniewski's uncle, Euzebiusz), Krzysztof Leśniewski (uncle Euzebiusz's grandson), Stanisław Lewiński (uncle Ludwik's grandson), Barbara Szarejko (the granddaughter of Leśniewska's brother, Stefan Prewysz-Kwinto), and Professor Władysław Pożaryski (the grandson of Leśniewska's grandfather's brother-in-law, Adolf Prewysz-Kwinto).

I am greatly indebted to them for their help; I regret that two people from the list did not live to see this publication.

I wish to express special thanks to Ewa Malicka (the daughter of Leśniewski's half-brother, Czesław), without whom this book would never have come into being. I could say the same about the late Professor Henryk Hiż, one of three students of Leśniewski (the other two were Professor Jerzy Kreczmar and Professor Czesław Lejewski) who I had direct contact with and with whom I had long discussions about Leśniewski's work and the characterological type of "Russian" Pole (Hiż himself was born in St. Petersburg, called "Petrograd" at that time).

I would also like to thank: Dr. hab. Piotr Brykczyński (also related to the Leśniewskis) for his mediation in making contact with the abovementioned Dr. Mieczysław Brykczyński; Professor Czesław Głombik for sharing with me the information concerning Leśniewski's ties with Edmund Husserl; and finally, Professor Leszek Zasztowt, whose family was neighbors with the Prewysz-Kwintos, and who gave me an idea of the atmosphere in a Borderlands (*Kresy*) house, similar to the one where Leśniewski spent many of his youthful years.

2

The book consists of five chapters. The focal point of the first chapter, "Life story — personality — *milieu*", is the *calendarium*. Preceded by Leśniewski's short (and probably only surviving) autobiography, it constitutes the most comprehensive chronological compilation of the events of his life thus far; it is mostly based on reliable sources — and sometimes directly on the relevant documents. A short description

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of Leśniewski's personality has been made on the basis of remarks scattered in texts by various authors. The list of students is far from complete.

The chapter ends in an autobiography of Leśniewski's youngest half-brother, Czesław, reconstructed by me. One of the reasons it is included here is that he was his great brother's student for two years at the University of Warsaw. The autobiography is a compilation drawn up with the use of several versions of his autobiographies from the early 1950s.

3

Chapter two, "Official assessments", consists of requests and justifications attached to them, which concern the creation of the extraordinary chair for Leśniewski at the University of Warsaw and admitting him the title of ordinary professor. One of the opinions was probably expressed by Waclaw Sierpiński (or possibly Stefan Mazurkiewicz?), the other — definitely by Łukasiewicz. Apart from historical value, they also have factual value, as they provide a substantial and competent description of Leśniewski's work, presented by the greatest contemporary experts, who N.B. have not ceased to be experts up today.

4

In chapter three, "In the eyes of the environment", there are texts in chronological order by the people who were in direct contact with Leśniewski at various points of his life.

The environment his wife, Zofia (of the Prewysz-Kwinto family), came from, was probably the greatest influence on Leśniewski's personality, sensibility and imagination. As I mentioned, it was a landowning-borderland environment. The bloody turmoil of war and carnage, referred to by its perpetrators as "revolutions" — and before that, the Tsar's post-uprising repressions — almost completely

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eliminated this environment and the world of its values from Polish culture. It is no wonder then than Kotarbiński, a typical inhabitant of the central Poland, (wrongly!) identified Leśniewski's mentality as "the Russian soul".

An extraordinary document which opens the chapter, that is, a description of Leśniewski's wedding reception in Kimborciszki in 1913, sheds some light on the atmosphere of the Borderlands. This immediate description was written by Janina Jankowska-Oryźyna (1893–1986), a subsequent connoisseur and promoter of folk crafts and an author of many books in this field. She was the sister of a poet, Jerzy Jankowski (1887–1941). I published this text, the typescript of which Professor Pożaryski shared with me, in 2003 in *Magazyn Wileński* [Jankowska-Oryźyna 2003].

This is followed by information about Leśniewski from *Diary* by Eugeniusz Romer [1995] and *Diaries* by Kazimierz Twardowski [1997], as well as from abundant communications between Władysław Witwicki and Twardowski (Witwicki's first preserved letter is dated February 5th, 1902, and the last: September 24th, 1937). Witwicki's letters contain many (unflattering!) statements about Leśniewski; all of them date from 1919–1924 and shed interesting light on the characters of both leading representatives of the Lvov-Warsaw School.

The texts which follow are of particular value: a funeral oration by Stefan Mazurkiewicz and a commemorative article by Jan Ostrowski-Naumoff: the only obituary in the daily press which I was able to attain. Other texts of great value are mentions of Leśniewski in Łukasiewicz's *Memoir* [2013], as well as "A Handful of Memories" by Kotarbiński [1958b], published on the twentieth anniversary of Leśniewski's death. It is supplemented with a fragment of Kotarbiński's letter to Twardowski.

The only text in this chapter which was not written by someone in close contact with Leśniewski is a belated (due to war) obituary by Daniela Gromska, one of Twardowski's students, well-informed about their colleagues' affairs.

5

A separate matter is the presence of texts by Leśniewski's three students from a later period in his life: Jerzy Słupecki, Czesław Lejewski and Henryk Hiż, included in chapter three.

They all wrote about their master on more than one occasion.

Słupecki (1904–1987) published two biographical notes about Leśniewski. Although they contain partially similar information, I decided to include both, since some details are depicted in a different light in them. Also, Lejewski (1913–2001) published two, much more extensive, biographical notes about Leśniewski, but they overlap to a large extent. Therefore, I am including one of them and have added a fragment which is significantly different in both versions.

The first of Hiż's (1917–2006) texts was in a way commissioned by me (I write about it in more detail in the introduction to this text). The second, although it partly overlaps with the first when it comes to information, is more extensive and contains many significant *addenda* to the first. This is why I decided to reprint both texts, as in the case of the biographical notes written by Słupecki.

At the end of the chapter, I include short statements about Leśniewski found in the preserved legacy of one of his (*quasi*)mentors (Mściśław Wartenberg), colleagues (Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Leon Chwistek, Kazimierz Kuratowski, Czesław Znamierowski, and Roman Ingarden) or students (Bolesław Sobociński, Kazimierz Pasenkiewicz, and Józef M. Bocheński).

6

In the fourth chapter, "From the correspondence", I primarily reprint twenty letters written by Leśniewski to Twardowski, as well as a few letters from Twardowski to Leśniewski: all that has survived from the ravages of history and which is kept in the Archive of the Polish Philosophical Society in Warsaw.

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These letters are valuable as a source of information, mostly for the sake of reconstruction of Leśniewski's biography, since all documents concerning him burned during World War II. They bring to light the complexity of Leśniewski's personality: they shed light on his amusing preferences, but also his inexplicable intellectual and emotional phobias, even approaching some kind of persecution mania at times;¹ they reveal a subtle deprecating humor which was so characteristic for him, as well as the preemptoriness of his unjust judgments of others; they attest that great regularity in some issues went hand in hand with severe carelessness in other matters.

They also constitute some value for reconstructing biographies of our other brilliant scholars. Among other things, they reveal Twardowski's attitude towards the sender of the letters: it had to be a very positive attitude since Leśniewski could take great liberties to make "lyrical" fun of his master, "St. Casimir", in his presence. In the background, there is also some tragic, albeit unclear, combination of circumstances casting a gloomy shadow on the relations between Tarski and Leśniewski, who, despite great admiration for his Ph.D. student's talent and theoretical results, felt more than personal reluctance towards him.

Still, apart from being of great value to biographers, the published letters are also valuable because they contain certain significant factual information concerning Leśniewski's work and philosophical views.

Apart from correspondence between Leśniewski and Twardowski, I include in this chapter a letter Leśniewski wrote to his brother Czesław and official letters in business matters as well as letters written by Leśniewski's wife, Zofia, to Kotarbiński. The last two groups of letters reveal how hard up the professor was during the interwar period and the tragic financial situation of the widow of the logical genius after World War II. This leads to the formulation of a thesis that the greatness of a state is a function of the way it treats its most eminent citizens.

¹ It is intriguing that similar symptoms appeared in J. Łukasiewicz by the end of his life.

7

Chapter five, “Work — the most important achievements”, is a discussion of the two main aspects of Leśniewski’s genius, written by myself.

8

In the Polish version of the book [Jadacki 2016], this chapter is followed by chapters “Genealogical tables” and “Illustrations”. In the last chapter, I placed all known portraits of Stanisław and Zofia Leśniewskis, as well as their ascendants and siblings, and group portraits of the Leśniewski and Prewysz-Kwinto families where Stanisław Leśniewski appears.

A series of photos from Leśniewski’s funeral in Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw is a shocking record. Thus, to refine the point I made in §6, the greatness of a country is measured with what kind of gravestones it builds for its finest citizens. A sad example of this is the gravestone of Twardowski, one of the most distinguished contributors to 20th century culture of Poland, in Łyczakowski Cemetery in Lvov: an iron cross with a metal plate

One’s identity is influenced by where one comes from and where one has lived. In the chapter “Places”, I included photographs of the places dearest to Leśniewski.

Particularly deserving of attention among the reproduced documents are the following three: an inscription for Twardowski on a copy of one of the earliest works by Leśniewski, the nomination for the title of professor signed by Józef Piłsudski, and a *curriculum vitae* written by Leśniewski himself.

I did not find any material memorabilia directly connected with Leśniewski, which is unsurprising, since his apartment burnt down in 1944, during the Warsaw Uprising. However, a few such souvenirs left by his wife were preserved, and I have included photographs of all of them.

Iconographic documentation is concluded with photographs of the Philosophers' Colonnade in the new Warsaw University Library.

There are sculptures of four prominent representatives of the Lvov-Warsaw School: Twardowski, Łukasiewicz, Tarski, and Leśniewski, by a distinguished Polish sculptor, Adam Myjak. I assisted in the creation of these sculptures: I prepared a justification for the choice of these particular individuals for the colonnade for the decision makers at the University of Warsaw, I provided photographic materials for the sculptor and I selected the quotations from their work which are presented on the columns.

The quotation from Leśniewski comes from *Foundations of the General Theory of Sets* and begins like this:

I admit freely that some of my theorems . . . could shock the “mathematical intuitions” of various more or less sensitive thinkers when contemplating the elegance of certain theoretical constructions, regardless of whether those constructions contribute in any degree whatsoever towards the scientific capturing of reality, or whether they merely serve to justify the dominant habits of our epoch, which distinguish themselves by a high degree of inertia. However, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of stating the fact [that I tried to write my work so that it would not concern exclusively some kind of “free creations” of various more or less Dedekindian creative souls; it follows hence], that I cared more about the fact that my theorems, while possessing as exact form as possible, would harmonize with the “common sense”. [Leśniewski 1916/1992.I: 130]

I attempted to minimize editorial corrections in texts which are not my own. Any omissions and interpolations are meticulously marked with the ellipsis:

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I also minimize footnotes where possible. If it is not otherwise stated, all footnotes are mine.

11

I may say, not without a certain degree of pride, that the present book is the most comprehensive compendium on the life and personality of Stanisław Leśniewski thus far.

However, I concede that some sources which I have not located may still be found.

Frankly speaking, I would be glad if this were the case.

The greater beam of light is shed on this extraordinary mind, the better.

Jacek Jadacki

Warsaw, on the centenary of taking over
the Chair of Philosophy of Mathematics
at the University of Warsaw
by Stanisław Leśniewski.

