

Dorota Samborska-Kukuć*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1943-6694>

In praise of vital records. A few cases

Anyone who studies the past knows well that basic and usually not falsified¹ information is stored in vital records. Though it is difficult to undermine the statements of narrativists, the representatives on new historiography, on the inability to strictly reconstruct history, while remaining free of any beliefs or unwitting transgressions, and the need to rather treat it as the object of interpretation², one must remember that there are many documents with a neutral status. Paul Ricoeur claimed that these include some which were not intended for posterity, which is why their contents may be considered objective. They leave specific traces, thus being an indicator, a reference, if you will, to help reconstruct past events.³ Vital records are mainly birth, death or marriage certificates, but also include other traces of everyday life, e.g. ad hoc correspondence, hand-written notes, *silva rerum*, various listings of residents, address books, and bills. Then there are the far from objective items, such as memoirs, journals, and letters, almost always written for some purpose, i.e. mostly shaped and faked, not

* Professor, University of Lodz, Department of Positivism and Young Poland, ul. Pomorska 171 /173, 90-236 Łódź, ddsk@wp.pl

- 1 Apart from falsifications of documents during wars, typical distortions include false ages of women entered in death certificates (less often in marriage certificates). Usually they are *rejuvenated* by a few years; the record in that respect belongs to Zofia Klimańska of the Chłopickis. Desztrungowa who lost a dozen or so years (!) in her death certificate. Other distortions are also usually associated with age, not always calculated with the utmost precision, which is why death or marriage certificates are not the most reliable sources for establishing a person's date of birth.
- 2 H. White, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego*, trans. E. Domańska, Universitas, Krakow 2010, and F. Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, Universitas, Krakow 2005.
- 3 P. Ricoeur, *Czas i opowieść*, trans. M. Frankiewicz (et al.), vol. 3 *Czas opowiadany*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Krakow 2008, p. 168.

constituting a “true expression.”⁴ They can only be considered useful when the details generated therein undergo verification through a process of triangulation, i.e. matching and comparing with at least two other sources regarding the same events, persons, contexts, etc., in order to check the reliability of the proposed version⁵.

The types of vital records kept in archives and/or specific parishes is fundamental in every aspect for the historian or the biographer. That is why any genealogical or biographical (final or intermediate) search should basically start with a survey of those primary sources, not derivative findings. Those include manuscript material, recorded in Latin, Polish or Russian (German).⁶ There we seek not only such facts as dates and names, but also people’s ancestry, kinship, affinity, progeny, their professions, addresses, and the names of the witnesses, which usually refer to other sources opening new fields of investigation. Some archive-based discoveries offer revelations in comparison to previous knowledge; they not only reveal things that had been unknown, but can also shatter what had seemed a coherent, stable and air-tight construct; they uncover facts hidden for various reasons, replaced by myths complementary to the accepted biographical paradigm or a work which was created at a specific time and/or place. Therefore, they offer material which can be used to build certain strict arrangements, or which can be used to deconstruct and correct those which are faulty, inducing and requiring reassessment.

Throughout my nearly twenty years of archive research, which resulted in new findings or modifications of previous ones, I found some interesting cases, which are worth mentioning either as individual or symptomatic examples. While the former were incidental and occurred as if at random or after effects of other intentional forays, the latter were the results of presumptions, hypotheses, and purposeful specific explorations. Usually such discoveries referred to new sources, from which through triangulation or a double collage formed completely new qualities, on the basis of the original rudimentary elements. Sometimes their value was al-

4 The problems of autobiographies (and personal writings) were discussed by M. Czerwińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie*, Universitas, Krakow 2004, cf. P. Lejeune, *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii*, trans. W. Grajewski (et al.), R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska (ed.), Universitas, Krakow 2001.

5 The methodology of biographical studies was discussed in a handbook: *Jak rekonstruować biografię i jak opisać twórczość XIX-wiecznego pisarza minorum gentium? (metodologia, źródła, struktury narracji)*, Primum Verbum, Łódź 2012, pp. 13–56; cf. R. Sitek, “Biografia i metoda: biografia jako klucz do zrozumienia osobowości twórczej”, *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* 2010, col. 1, pp. 19–38; E. Skibińska, „Badania biograficzne – dylematy metodologiczne (wybrane zagadnienia)”, *Studia Edukacyjne* 2008, issue 8, pp. 77–86; J. Clifford, *Od kamyków do mozaiki. Zagadnienia biografii literackiej*, trans. A. Mysłowska, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1978.

6 In the areas of the 1st and the 2nd partitions – around 1865 – in the Kingdom.

most autarkic, not even requiring any further specification. Thus, newly formed contexts enabled me to see that which had previously been hidden or which had been permeating ever so slightly, not entitling any speculations.

Case 1. Mickiewicz

An important element in Adam Mickiewicz's biography was the myth of his perfect, reciprocated love for Maryla Wereszczakówna, who was forced for economic reasons to marry Wawrzyniec Puttkamer, whom she never loved. Leaving Puttkamer and his alleged riches aside, a document found in the St. John's parish in Vilnius, i.e. the baptism certificate of Helena Teofila Franciszka Puttkamer, the daughter of Maria and Wawrzyniec, dated 3 November 1823⁷, helped verify the myth on the *marriage blanc* of the poet's lover, which supposedly lasted since the day of her marriage (2/14 February 1821) until Mickiewicz's departure from Lithuania (autumn of 1824)⁸. Furthermore, it enabled, considering the sender's pregnancy and the related remarks, a rather different reading of Mrs. Puttkamer's letters to Jan Czeczot and Tomasz Zan included in Jan Czubek's collection *Archiwum Filomatów*⁹, and, what is more, properly interpret her peculiar last will¹⁰, which she recorded at a notary with her husband present on 8 November 1823, i.e. a few days after the birth and death of the child¹¹. The conclusions drawn from the triangulation of three sources: baptism certificate, correspondence, and the legacy document, first of all, demystified the legend on the Girl and Gustaw, secondly, it proved Maria's moods previously considered as melancholy and longing for Mickiewicz to be antepartum depression and aversion to the future child, which in fact, due to Maria's excessive physical activity which she herself reported in her letter to Czeczot and Zan, was

7 Vilnius Births, Deaths and Marriages Register Office/St. John's parish, in: Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas (LVIA), ref. F604, op. 10, vol. 240, file ref. no. 242 dated 1823.

8 T. Pini, "O 'białym małżeństwie' Maryli", *Ruch Literacki* 1934, issue 3, pp. 73–77. Such nonsense formed due to the legends developed and propagated by Antoni Edward Odyniec and Ignacy Domeyko.

9 *Archiwum Filomatów*, part 1. *Korespondencja 1815–1823*, published by J. Czubek, by the Akademii Umiejętności, Krakow 1913, vol. 4–5 (in particular letters LDCXCI, DCXCII. DXXVIII, DCCXL, DCCIII, DCXCV, DCCIV, DCCXVI).

10 L. Podhorski-Okołów, "Testament Maryli", in: idem, *Realia Mickiewiczowskie*, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 1999, pp. 206–217.

11 Helena Teofila lived only two days, she died on 4 November 1823 and was buried in the Bernardine Cemetery in Vilnius, Vilnius Births, Deaths and Marriages Register Office/parish xx. Bernardine, in: LVIA, ref. F604, op. 10, vol. 251, l. 725, file ref. no. 2757 dated 1823. I found that certificate in Vilnius once my book *Od Puttkamerów do Konopnickich. Rewizje i rekonstrukcje biograficzne*, IBL PAN, Warsaw 2016, had already been published; it includes a chapter vital for the discussion: "Dziecko z 'białego małżeństwa' Puttkamerów", pp. 9–27.

born clearly prematurely and died soon afterwards. Thirdly, it might have been then that Mrs. Puttkamer attempted to commit suicide, since she was persuaded to record her last will to the sole benefit of her husband.

Apart from biographical contexts, the fact that Mrs. Puttkamer was pregnant, of which Mickiewicz learned at the beginning of summer (which seems to be corroborated by the disgust and disappointment-filled letter of 18/30 June he wrote to Czeszot), resulted in the creation of several texts. Known for his aversion to family life ("I am just as revolted at any description of family life as at the sight of married couples and children – that is my only antipathy"¹²), he considered his affair with Mrs. Puttkamer finished. A kind of a symbol of their parting was the dedication poem *Do Marii P. ofiarując jej drugi tomik Poezyj* (given to Mrs. Puttkamer on 12/24 May 1823¹³). It was, as Juliusz Kleiner called it, a gift and an act of resignation¹⁴. The addressee was referred to as "sister", whose "decision prevents" her from being called a lover. Her decisions resonated "the oddities of fate", irreversibly defining the poet's role of a "brother".

Was it then (or immediately afterwards?) that Mickiewicz wrote his probably best-known love poem *Do M* (Precz z moich oczu)*? It has never been established when exactly the poem was written. The inscription underneath it reads 1823 but if one assumes Mickiewicz wrote it at that time exactly, it is no longer the pathetic complaint of a rejected heart but an ironic farewell to a woman who is sentenced to a painful pondering of her crime. Neither can one omit the verses of *New Year's Wishes*, a poem Mickiewicz wrote in prison, which recapitulated the closed chapter in his life:

I have dreamed and I have pined. I soared and then I fell.
Of a peerless rose I dreamed, and to gather it I thought,
When I awoke. Then vanished the rose with the dream's bright spell –
Thorns in my breast alone were left – Love I desire not!¹⁵

The coincidence of the birth of Helena, Maryla's daughter, and Gustaw's death (birth of Konrad), is both significant and somewhat symbolic. Was it supposed to indicate the end of youthful fantasies, along with the belief in platonic love and kindred spirits? I wonder whether the Puttkamers thought about that relationship while reading *Forefathers' Eve*? The previously unreleased personal dilemmas of

¹² "List Adama Mickiewicza do Franciszka Malewskiego z listopada 1822", in: *Korespondencja Adama Mickiewicza*, vol. 1, Księgarnia Luxemburska, Paris 1871, p. 5. [Unless specified otherwise, English version translated from Polish]

¹³ M. Dernałowicz, K. Kostenicz, *Kronika życia i twórczości Mickiewicza. Lata 1798–1824*, PIW, Warsaw 1957, p. 410.

¹⁴ J. Kleiner, *Mickiewicz*, vol. 1, *Dzieje Gustawa*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 1948, p. 339.

¹⁵ A. Mickiewicz, *New Year's Wishes*, various editions.

Mickiewicz's, understood as versions of the Wertherian and imaginative persona, might have carried more concrete qualities of disappointment: distaste in family life, resentment towards corporeal femininity, which could have impacted his works written at that time.

Case 2. Konopnicka

The case of Maria Konopnicka proves the importance of conducting genealogical surveys prior to editing a writer's correspondence and writing a serious monograph. Then the identification of the persons appearing in the collection of her letters to her uncle Ignacy Wasiłowski¹⁶ and his sons and daughters¹⁷ would not cause trouble and it would be more complete, full of details factually both important and necessary. The extensive and impressive editions by Jacek Nowak and Lena Magnone, and Magnone's monograph,¹⁸ would surely benefit from verifying the existing progeny of Maria and Jarosław Konopnickis, which are rudimentary due to an erroneous reading of their vital records by Halina Sławińska, as well as specific information on Helena, the poet's unruly daughter, and Jerzy, her illegitimate son¹⁹. The last details in particular would have been significant in the context of the researcher's studies of the emotional turbulences in the difficult mother-daughter relations transferred to the field of literature (*Panna Florentyna*).

Through surveys of archives for establishing the identity and affinity of the persons surrounding the poet, she could be viewed in reference to both her direct and extended family. One could ask why she did not visit Rozalia Wasiłowska of the Paczuskis, her paternal grandmother, who died when Konopnicka was almost forty, and why in her letters written immediately after Wasiłowska's death (1881) she did not mention her grandmother even once. For years, she remained in contact with Waleria Kuligowska of the Wasiłowskis 1 v. Pischowa, her uncle's wife, and her three daughters: Bronisława, Kazimiera, and Maria. She also wrote the family of her other uncle's wife: Ludwika Rudzińska of the Wasiłowskis. In tracing her contacts, it becomes clear that the correspondence resulted from their common business, not family sentiment. That is how Konopnicka was (clearly visible in her letters to her children): always pragmatic, factual, and sensible²⁰.

16 M. Konopnicka, *Listy do Ignacego Wasiłowskiego*, J. Nowak (ed.), IBL PAN, Warsaw 2005.

17 M. Konopnicka, *Listy do synów i córek*, L. Magnone (ed.), IBL PAN, Warsaw 2010.

18 L. Magnone, *Maria Konopnicka. Lustra i symptomy, słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2011.

19 H. Sławińska, "Lata gorzkich doświadczeń", in: *Śladami życia i twórczości Marii Konopnickiej. Szkice historyczno-literackie. Wspomnienia. Materiały biograficzne*, collected and edited by J. Baculewski, Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, Warsaw 1963, endnote 73, p. 323–324.

20 I discussed the issue of Jarosław and Maria Konopnickis' progeny and their problems with Helena which could have had an influence on Maria's turbulent personal life in two chapters: "Progenitura Marii i Jarosława Konopnickich w świetle odnalezionych metryk" and "'Nieudana' córka

Having found all the vital records (of births, marriages and deaths) related to the poet's parents and siblings, one is able to not only organise the details regarding their fortunes and reveal the dates and places of their deaths, but also to verify the previous faulty convictions, somewhat generated by Konopnicka herself, that Józef Wasiłowski, her father, died in Warsaw. His death certificate is kept at the Wygiełzów parish²¹, while his tomb is located by the tomb of Laura Stanisławska, his daughter, not Jadwiga Węglińska, as is commonly assumed, in a cemetery not far from Łęki Szlacheckie in Ręczno²². The error proves that trusting the recollections of the object of a study may lead one astray.

Case 3. Leśmian

Just as astray were the biographers of Bolesław Leśmian, as he recorded his birth date not as 1877 (as was unequivocally proven based on later documents) but 1878. It seemed that any biographical issues regarding the author of *Shadowy Drink*, his loved ones and his acquaintances, who all inspired works, were known and, thus, the related contexts were studied sufficiently. Unfortunately, the fact that his biographers' shunned archives resulted in various gaps and distortions, traces of which are clearly visible in the 2016 study *Kalendarium Leśmianowskie* developed by Jacek Trznadel, a leading researcher of Leśmian²³, which is actually quite necessary and useful. It baffles belief that all of the lovers of his poetry failed to find his birth certificate, resorting to trusting unverified information from derivative sources. Only when his certificate of conversion was published by Piotr Łopuszański, was the previous year of 1877, as had been suggested earlier²⁴, proved indirectly. Meanwhile, the birth certificate, issued in a non-Christian commune, as Leśmian's family was of Jewish descent, survived waiting to be discovered. The same applied to other records, e.g. to the marriage certificate of Józef Lesman and Emma of the Sunderlands, his parents, both birth and death certificates of his siblings: Kazimierz and Aleksandra Lesman, and many more. Most of them include valuable and important details. Suffice to say that the poet's birth certificate offers two important pieces of information: the place of his birth, and the previously unknown oc-

(i niechciany wnuk) Marii Konopnickiej – wobec nowych dokumentów" in the previously-mentioned book: *Od Puttkamerów do Konopnickich...*, pp. 169–220.

²¹ Wygiełzów Births, Deaths and Marriages Register Office/the Visitation of Mary Roman-Catholic parish, in: State Archive in Łódź, ref. 48/322, file ref. no. 12 of 1878.

²² I presented my genealogical study on Maria Konopnicka in an article entitled "O antenatach i rodzeństwie Marii Konopnickiej – przyczynki genealogiczno-biograficzne" *Ruch Literacki* 2018, col. 1, pp. 89–108.

²³ J. Trznadel, *Kalendarium Leśmianowskie. Życie i twórczość w układzie chronologicznym*, PIW, Warsaw 2016.

²⁴ P. Łopuszański, *Leśmian*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2000, p. 14.

cupation of his father, who was previously considered a railways operative in Kiev. Yet the content of the certificate offer a supplement to the biography of Józef Lesman, who before that was a journalist and the publisher of the *Przyroda I Przemysł* periodical, and a business partner of Seweryn Sunderland, his brother-in-law.²⁵

Genealogical surveys aimed at establishing Leśmian's kinship and affinity, e.g. to Antoni Lange, revealed one more interesting trace. A family ancestor by the name of Antoni Eisenbaum, a maskil, well-educated, publisher of *Dostrzegacz Nadwiślański*, i.e. the first Polish-Jewish periodical published in Polish territories, director of Warszawska Szkoła Rabinów, was Leśmian's direct grand-grandfather (and Lange's grandfather); the author of *Meadow*, the most talented of the three poets, had in his genes more of Eisenbaum than Eisenbaum's other descendants, because both Leśmian's father, Józef Lesman, and his mother, Emma of the Sunderlands, were related to him. While his paternal line was known, his maternal relations, i.e. of the Sunderlands with the Eisenbaums, proved surprising.²⁶

Another example from Leśmian's surroundings were the facts regarding Dora Lebenthal, the poet's true love, immortalised, e.g. in the series *W malinowym chruśniaku*. The knowledge on her, is admittedly fuzzy, because it comes from the accounts of Ludwika Mazurowa, the poet's daughter, and Jan Brzechwa, his cousin, which prove incorrect in many instances. Vital records refuted the general conviction that she was married to Józef Szper, a Warsaw-based surgeon; her medical specialisation was not gynaecology but dermatology; and it also proved quite unlikely that she was the sole owner of a suite in Marszałkowska St., which she supposedly sold to save Leśmian's finances after the Zamość scandal. Thanks to extensive studies into old periodicals, address books, and other sources it was also possible to establish some basic facts about her parents: rather affluent Warsaw Jews Cecylia of the Goldszoms and Kiwa Lebenthals.²⁷

Case 4. How legends form. Maria Piotrowiczowa

Maria Piotrowiczowa of the Rogolińskis, a January Uprising insurgent fallen in a battle at Dobra near Stryków, is the symbol of the national liberation struggles in the Łódź region. Her spectacular participation in the insurrection became

²⁵ I analysed that and other vital records which in well-known contexts offer completely new implications or series thereof in an article: "Kiedy naprawdę urodził się Leśmian. O metryce i innych nieznanych dokumentach", *Teksty Drugie* 2017, issue 4, pp. 303–317.

²⁶ I discussed that in an article: "Antoni Eisenbaum – protoplasta poetów, artystów, intelektualistów", *„Wiecznie siebie nowego głodnym jak żuraw z szyją w przyszłość wyciągniętą” – Bolesław Leśmian 1877–1937*, A. Kluba (ed.), IBL PAN, Warsaw 2017, pp. 23–28.

²⁷ I discussed that in detail in my study: "Korekty i uzupełnienia do biografii Teodory (Dory) Lebenthal", *Teksty Drugie* 2018, col. 1, pp. 358–373.

the basis for the creation of the legend of the masochistic heroine who gave her young life in a selfless act of fervent patriotism. There is little truth in the monumental legend. What it does not lack, though, is the myth-forming interpretation. A search for the presence of that extraordinary figure in vital records revealed a rather different chain of events and other contexts than the ones described by derivative sources.

Distortions became visible already when establishing basic facts: her date of birth and even her maiden surname. According to the legend, which saw Piotrowiczowa similarly to Emilia Plater or Joan D'Arc, in 1863 shewas slightly over twenty, while, actually, she was already thirty. The fact she was referenced by the surname Michalska (that was the surname of her stepfather, the second husband of Ansberta of the Badyńskis) indicated poor knowledge of the facts by those who concocted the insurgent's biography through their romantic imagination, which was far from the truth. To show how her patriotism formed, with her convictions stemming from her childhood and her family history, they exaggerated not only her father's participation in the November Uprising, but also of her various uncles. Moreover, they altered, not knowing the reality or simply forging it, the facts about her upbringing to match that of typical gentry houses: an "old servant" supposedly taught the lass fencing and horse riding "in the old manor of her forefathers". In fact, the "old servant" was a hunter only two years older than she was, while the "old manor" was the recently settled Michalskis mansion of Stanisław Strzałkowski, a Radogoszcz man of means and a relative. Being an old bachelor without any affinity, Strzałkowski gave them his property to ensure stability when he got old.

Yet neither the manor in Radogoszcz nor the residence in Krzucz near Sieradz, inherited after the rather premature demise of Maria's father, were her family homes. That was because she was, rather early in her life, most probably after her mother's second marriage, sent (just like her two younger sisters) to live with her more distant relatives. As she was brought up by an aunt in Zalesie near Wieluń, she probably did not contact her mother, who did not even come to her wedding. Her relations with Michalska were restored only in the summer of 1862. Maria herself had selected her husband and decided her own fate when she came with Konstanty to Chocianowice near Łódź, where he taught at an elementary school. She also decided about her participation in the Uprising. When Konstanty, suffering from a severe heart condition, set off into the field, she accompanied him, though she was far into her pregnancy and had left her two children in Radogoszcz (with her mother or sister). She could not have anticipated that the next day in Dobra, where a group of insurgents had headed, the battle would take place, as that was the result of someone informing the Russian troops stationed near Piotrków. When during the fight a Cossack wounded her husband, Maria, convinced it was a mortal blow, thrust desperately into the battle, losing her own life. Konstanty Piotrowicz

died a few days later in a Łódź field hospital probably not, as the legend would like us to think, on hearing that his wife had died, but due to his wounds. Her burial would also inspire unlikely events, e.g. a Russian officer crying over Maria's coffin seems almost naive and tailored to the myth-building needs of the extraordinary tale. What the legend omits is a different fact: that the morning after Maria's tragic death, during a row with the Cossacks who brought her body to Radogoszcz and demanded ransom, her step-father Michalski was struck with rifle butt on the head and died. A dozen or so days later, Strzałkowski, the family's benefactor, died as well. Through a process of verification based on an extensive study of vital records and Konstanty Piotrowicz's official notes from the Chocianowice school, the chain of events revealed themselves, exposing the myth, which included inventions combined by the paradigm rather than facts which could rationally explain the unclear or even seemingly extraordinary details²⁸.

Miscellaneous cases

Surveys of vital records regarding January Uprising insurgents indicated the determination of the young men who participated in that national struggle. The case of Jan Paweł Gadomski, a student of Szkoła Główna Warszawska, showed that despite being the sole heir of a rather big fortune (a palace in Smoszew near Zakroczym), with expectations of doing great things (he was a gifted poet), he decided to join the Uprising, in which he eventually perished.

A review of death certificates in towns and villages where battles took place indicates that the victims were not predominantly, as it has been commonly assumed, from gentry families. It is true that in many cases entire families died during a single engagement, e.g. three Czajkowski brothers at Krzywosądz²⁹. But then, e.g. in the battle at Dobra, there were just as many residents of manors as Łódź and Zgierz workers and nearby peasants among the fallen. Such findings require one to rethink the thesis that every stage of the January Uprising was devised by gentry who tried to save the state they had lost partially by their own doing. Of course, to be able to reliably diagnose the state of matters and establish the stages of the engagement of townspeople and peasants in the Uprising³⁰, it would be necessary

28 I devoted a chapter to Maria Piotrowiczowa in the book *Placz Antygony. O ludziach powstania styczniowego*, Wydawnictwo UŁ, Łódź 2017.

29 In the death records recorded by the vicar in Latin under the date of 19 February, there is an entry about three Czajkowski brothers: Antoni, Marian and Marceli, sons of Józef and Helena of the Kolankiewicz, residing in Tuczo.

30 As Sławomir Kalemka posited (*Powstanie Styczniowe 1863–1864. Wrzenie. Bój. Europa. Wizje*, PWN, Warsaw 1990, p. 368), "the farther you go east, the less developed the Uprising was, the shorter it was, the fewer townspeople and peasants participated and the higher was their hostility, i.e. the Uprising carried a more gentry nature."

to survey parish archives where the deaths of the fallen in the 1863–1864 battles were recorded. A village near Łódź, due to the region's diversity (and a rather early stage of the Uprising, i.e. 24 February 1863) cannot offer a *pars pro toto* example, but some doubts prevail.

Another discovery was that the Uprising in the Polish Livonia, which Latvian historians considered a suicide³¹ (due to both geographical and social reasons), was directed and inspired by the Tzar's government with the intention to create a pretext to oust Poles over the Dźwina and confiscate their property. Józef Ponset, an emissary, who encouraged young Livonian men in April 1863 to rise up, was most probably a spy using the identity of an insurgent killer in the battle of Pieskowa Skała. Ponset's activities caused chaotic and logistically unprepared motions, as a result of which the local Kraslava raskolniki (Old Believer) population looted and burnt down manors, Uprising insurgents by the order of Mikhail Muyavyov were either shot (e.g. Leon Plater) or exiled and their families were sentenced to huge contributions which exceeded their income from their property³².

Other more personal findings resulting from the explorations of vital records offered information on affinity between writers. For example, Stanisław Jachowicz, author of tales and a philanthropist, was related to and really good friends with Józef Paszkowski, a translator of Shakespeare. Moreover, vital record surveys focused on both writers indicate what kind of people they were. Jachowicz, despite his continuing poverty, raised not only his two sons but also several children of Joanna Wolska of the Ośniałowskis, his late sister-in-law, and an adopted girl and his pupil, who was orphaned in early childhood. That girl was Seweryna (Kazimiera) Stompf, who later married Paszkowski. All the children not only received basic financial security, but, as their later fortunes indicated, became respectable people, some of whom actively participated in future cultural and literary life³³.

The birth date of Waław Berent was a peculiar biographical lapse. We know very little about the life of the author of *Próchno*. One reason was that Berent intentionally destroyed documents (biographical material, manuscripts, notes, etc.³⁴). Another was that the surveys conducted by researchers were not extensive enough or successful. Jerzy Paszek, the author of the introduction to the 1979 National Library edition³⁵, complained about those insufficiencies, yet he did not find it neces-

31 Ē. Jēkabsons, "Stosunki polsko-łotewskie na przestrzeni dziejów", in: *Polacy na Łotwie*, E. Walewander (ed.), Instytut Badań nad Polonią i Duszpasterstwem Polonijnym, Lublin 1993, p. 31.

32 D. Samborska-Kukuć, "Wydarzenia 1863 roku w Inflantach Polskich w relacjach i wspomnieniach", *Zapiski Historyczne* 2008, col. 4, pp. 131–142.

33 I discussed it in more detail in a chapter: "Dwie żony Stanisława Jachowicza" in a book *Od Puttkamerów do Konopnickich...*, pp. 121–144.

34 Only rudimentary material (rough drafts of *Próchno*, a few poems, letters to the publisher) survived and are now kept by the National Library.

35 J. Paszek, "Wstęp", in: W. Berent, *Próchno*, J. Paszek (ed.), Ossolineum, Wrocław 1979, p. II.

sary to correct them. He made an error in Berent's date of birth even though, as one might assume from context, he was in possession (or only knew the content) of the official certificate stating the true date. It seems, however, that he repeated the information from a prior researcher³⁶, because his mistake consisted of an erroneous calculation of days from the specific date considering the differences between the old and the new style: instead of twelve he added thirteen days³⁷. Additionally, he provided no details, in particular his key source, i.e. the number of the certificate. The incorrect and unverified date of 28 September is used even today in all profiles of Berent. In fact, based on the writer's birth certificate kept at the State Archive in Warsaw, Berent was born on 15/27 September 1873.³⁸ The certificate also includes several more significant details. His parents were Protestant (Lutheran), which was why they baptised their children in an Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession parish. That was also where on 4/16 November Wacław Karol, son of Karol and Paulina nee Deike Berents, was baptised.

All the information was acquired almost entirely from vital records, and upon proper comparison with other sources it revealed not only fragments of biographies, but also offered basis for conclusions on property, social or even ethical matters. The discussed cases indicate the necessity and the benefit of seeking basic sources, through which the acquired details become accurate and certain. They prevent mistakes from being propagated, they break the chain of erroneous details copied vacantly, derived from memoir-based gossip, unstable information (e.g. tomb inscriptions), as a result of which readers receive mere paralogsms instead of proper conclusions. Those cases may serve as a warning against mindless copying of statements by prior researchers and as an incentive to approach derivative sources with more suspicion, especially those which carry a subjective tint. They may also trigger research inquisitiveness, which requires solid surveys, extensive analyses, and re-syntheses creating new compatible sets. Initially, they may seem incomplete, like the periodic table of elements, but the relations uncovered in hypotheses may in the future prove extremely helpful. That is, in fact, the only way to give durable and irrefutable scientific findings because they are documented by serious certificates.

36 Certainly not after Władysław Studencki (*O Wacławie Berencie*, part I (1873–1918), Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, Opole 1968, p. 104), which includes a translation of the certificate into Russian, yet it remains unknown why Studencki only added five days to the old-style date of birth stating it as 20 September.

37 Thirteen days were first added in the 20th c. (in vital records of Poles to the year of regaining independence in 1918).

38 Warsaw Births, Deaths and Marriages Register Office/Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession parish, in: State Archive in Warsaw, ref. 0181, file ref. no. 501 of 1873. Studencki provided an incorrect certificate number, i.e. 385.

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Dorota Samborska-Kukuć

Pochwała metrykaliów. Kilka przypadków

Streszczenie

Pożytek płynący z korzystania z metryk (urodzeń, ślubów i zgonów) – jako źródeł prymarnych – jest dla historyka literatury nieprzeceniony. Wiedza ta, pod każdym względem indyferentna, stanowi podstawowy budulec zarówno dla konkretnych biografii jednostkowych, jak i kontekstów służących rekonstrukcji jakiegoś fragmentu historycznego. W odróżnieniu od dokumentów osobistych zabarwionych subiektywnie, zawiera na ogół wiedzę pewną i ścisłą.

Kilka omówionych przypadków dowodzi konieczności sięgania po podstawowe dokumenty, które zawierają nie tylko dane personalne czy daty graniczne, ale także informacje o wykonywanych zawodach, miejscu urodzenia, zamieszkania, śmierci, pokrewieństwach, powinowactwach, a nawet kręgu towarzyskim. Odnalezienie aktu urodzenia córki Marii i Wawrzyńca Puttkamerów pozwala inaczej odczytać listy z kręgu filomatów z roku 1823, w innym świetle zobaczyć rzekomy romans Mickiewicza z Puttkamerową. Rekonstrukcja genealogiczna rodu Marii Konopnickiej staje się niezbędna do wyjaśnienia personaliów osób z jej listów i wzmianek. Dokumentacja metrykalna dotycząca Bolesława Leśmiana odsłania nieznane dotąd badaczom szczegóły jego życiorysu i osób z nim związanych. Prześledzenie biografii Marii Piotrowiczowej oparte niemal wyłącznie na metrykach, odsłania kolejną jej losu pokrytą legendą.

Te i inne jeszcze przypadki są zachętą do eksploracji archiwów w poszukiwaniu dokumentów o randze fundamentalnej, która chroni przed paralogizmami i przezywa sztafetę błędnych powielań otwierając drogi ku dalszym penetracjom źródeł.

Słowa kluczowe: metrykalia, archiwa

In praise of vital records. A few cases

Summary

A literary historian finds birth, death, and marriage certificates incredibly useful as primary research sources. Detached as it is, this knowledge serves as a solid basis both for individual biographies and contexts meant to reconstruct a particular historical thread. Personalised documentation is subjective by nature, while the discussed documents tend to contain accurate and unbiased data.

The cases discussed herein prove the need to consult both standard documents for personal data and dates of birth/death, as well as the information on occupation, place of birth/residence/death, kinship and affinity, even milieu. Thanks to the discovery of the birth certificate of Maria and Wawrzyniec Puttkamer's daughter, the Philomaths' letters of 1823 could be seen in a different light, as could the alleged affair between Maria Puttkamer and Adam Mickiewicz. To explicate and substantiate the personal data included in Maria Konopnicka's letters and notes, a genealogical reconstruction of her family is in order. Bolesław Leśmian's vital records revealed hitherto unknown details of his biography (and of people associated with him). A scrutiny of Maria Piotrowicz's biography, based almost exclusively on certificates, disclosed the legendary story of her life.

The above are mere examples of all the cases that can prompt researchers to explore archives in search of fundamental documentation, which can prevent paralogisms and help break the chain of errors with a view to further data mining.

Keywords: vital records, archives

Dorota Samborska-Kukuć, prof. dr hab., kierownik Zakładu Literatury Pozytywizmu i Młodej Polski Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego; historyk literatury, kresoznawca, genealog, biograf. Zajmuje się – jako literaturoznawca – przede wszystkim dziewiętnastowiecznością, szczególnie zaś zjawiskami i fenomenami pogranicznymi oraz – jako genealog – rekonstruowaniem i korygowaniem biografii głównie postaci i rodzin związanych z literaturą. Ostatnio wydała książki: *Od Puttkamerów do Konopnickich. Rewizje i rekonstrukcje biograficzne* (Warszawa 2016), *Płacz Antygony. O ludziach powstania styczniowego* (Łódź 2017), *Henryk Sienkiewicz – pryzmaty czytania. Studia i szkice literackie* (Kraków 2018).

Dorota Samborska-Kukuć, professor, head of the Department of Positivism and Young Poland, University of Lodz; literary historian, specialist in Polish Borderlands, genealogist, biographer. Her academic focus as a literary scientist, applies to the 19th century, in particular the fringe phenomena, and her academic focus as a genealogist applies to reconstructing and correcting the biographies of mainly individuals and families related to literature. She recently published: *Od Puttkamerów do Konopnickich. Rewizje i rekonstrukcje biograficzne* (Warsaw 2016), *Płacz Antygony. O ludziach powstania styczniowego* (Łódź 2017), *Henryk Sienkiewicz – pryzmaty czytania. Studia i szkice literackie* (Krakow 2018).