

A city of poetry – Lublin literary meetings

In 2008 “The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” centre and the Department of Polish Studies of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin organized the first edition of the festival “A city of poetry”. Lublin with its atmosphere and tradition constitutes an unique place to talk about poetry and organize meetings with poets as well as to carry out various social and artistic activities to make poetry more popular.

Józef Czechowicz has become a spiritual patron of the Lublin poetic meetings and a prize awarded by the “City of Poetry” has been named “Stone” – like the title of the first volume of poems written by the poet in 1927. It is good to recall the names of the prize-winners: Ryszard Krynicki (2008), Julia Hartwig (2009), Tomasz Różycki (2010) as well as Piotr Matywiecki (2011). The meetings, activities and events related to poetry took place in the lecture halls of the university, libraries, community centres and in the streets, park avenues, squares, bus stops, PKP station, welfare homes, hospitals, schools, churches, galleries, cafes, interiors of trolley buses. Tattooing of Lublin pavements with tens of poems has become a tradition of the “City of poetry.”

In 2009 the characteristic feature of the “City of poetry” was the incorporation of its activities carried out in a private space into the schedule. This way, the people who created even the simplest events in their homes inspired by poetry have become the co-authors and animators of the “City of poetry.” In those meetings the hosts’ favourite poems were read or the meeting with the invited poet was held.

It was very easy to notice that there were many theatrical and paratheatrical activities in the “City of Poetry.” A staging of the events expressed itself e.g. by appearance of many surprising objects in the city’s space. These objects created a scenery for the “City of Poetry.” A few of them are: a wardrobe, a table, suitcases, radio, portable printing office, jukebox, trolley bus. The presence of these objects emphasized the character of the events taking place on a borderline of the street theatre, the happening and the visual arts.

It is very important for us that the “City of Poetry” is built by the inhabitants of Lublin – therefore a cooperation with many milieus, persons as well as the rich programme frameworks enables both amateurs, recognized poets and critics to meet in the “City of Poetry.” In short, the “City of Poetry” has its agora but also numerous alleys, passages and back streets.

Tomasz Pietrasiewicz

A city of Poetry: idea (manifesto)

1.

“A city of Poetry” is a course embracing cultural events co-organised by “The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre and the Department of Polish Studies of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (in the first edition in 2008). The diversified events – ranging from artistic and popularizing to scientific – related to literature and its presence in Lublin take place all year round. A motto of this enterprise is an expression: “A city of poetry – poetry of a city.”

2.

Poetry constitutes a cultural character of Lublin in an expressive and significant way, which makes our city an unique place on a map of Poland. Many important, and frequently very prominent poets like Kochanowski, Rej, Klonowic, Krasicki, Koźmian, Pol, Arnsztajnowa, Łobodowski, Czechowicz, Kamieńska, Hartwig, Stachura, Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, Świetlicki were bound up with Lublin. There live poets who co-create a panorama of a Polish contemporary poetry: Fert, Wierzbicki, Ostrowska, Niewiadomski. Lublin is also a place of an intensive poetry consideration - both scientific (both universities), critical-literary (here the important, to a large extent devoted to poetry literary magazines : “Kresy” and “Akcent” are published) as well as artistic (poetry has often been an inspiration and material on which the Lublin theatre artists and plastic artists work).

3.

Józef Czechowicz is the most important poet for our city. Being one of the most prominent poets of Polish language, he managed to show extraordinariness of Lublin in his poetic work. He named Lublin “a city of poets” (similarly did Wacław Gralewski in “Steely rainbow” and Tadeusz Kłak in the title of his book, “A city of poets,” dedicated to the Lublin poets of the interwar period). Therefore we reckon a poetic legend of Czechowicz a starting point for considering Lublin as a “City of Poetry.”

4.

We assume that the “City of Poetry” will be visited by the most prominent poets of all generations, respected critics and researchers of poetry. We plan a lot of activities thanks to which a presence of poetry in the public space will be made one of the characteristic features of the city. We are convinced that the asset of the whole enterprise constitutes, firstly, a close link between the events with an unique cultural colouring of Lublin making up the “City of Poetry;” secondly: a modern way of thinking about the presence of poetry in a contemporary world which underlies the project and of its place in a social life (it is important for us to deny a general conviction that poetry is an exclusively elitist art).

5.

We believe that the innovative forms of introduction of poetry in a city’ space, creative influence on awareness and imagination of its inhabitants as well as building an important ramification of an identity of Lublin as a city of a true presence and interaction of art are going to be a special quality of the festival – making it distinctive in the whole Europe. We want to make the inhabitants of Lublin feel that they live in a city that doesn’t have to be left in order to participate in many significant cultural events, that they can be created in Lublin and that these events can be important not only in the local but also all-Polish and European perspective. By

making Lublin a “City of Poetry” we want to release especially in young people the courage for imagination and creative thought. Without these features the cities and their neighboring regions are doomed to impoverishment and marginalization.

6.

The Festival is held in May therefore the teachers as well as students of the Lublin schools (ranging from primary to secondary schools), and universities (especially the Department of Polish Studies), the animators of culture belonging to these institutions, which carry out educational activities (especially the libraries and community centres) are given a chance to participate in the event. The way in which the enterprise is carried out enables us to make use of the potential existing in the artistic milieu of Lublin – theatres, galleries and artists association.

7.

We hope that the representatives of local authorities, local politicians and the journalists of Lublin media, so all the people who have the present and the future of Lublin in their hands will feel as exceptional as the co-hosts of the “City of Poetry.”

8.

We believe that the “City of Poetry” being expanded and modernized in the coming years will become an important place on the cultural map of Poland (Europe) and thus will be a strong argument in Lublin’s efforts to be awarded a title of the European Capital of Culture 2016.

Witold Dąbrowski, Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, Paweł Próchniak

The City of Poetry (the finish saying)

1.

The “City of Poetry” is a place of imagination, it is a metaphor which finds its shape; finds a real, visible shape in Lublin – before our very eyes but also in the way we look at this city.

2.

The “City of Poetry” is created by poems and poets, that is obvious, but it owes its existence also to the attentive and sensitive readers – their courage and passion. I can’t mention all of them but without them Lublin would not exist.

3.

The “City of Poetry” is different from a majority of metropolises in a way that its downtown constitute alleys, passages – the round of meetings with poets and critics. Around these meetings spread squares and streets of festal setting. But everything is here equally important. Every yota, comma, stone is important. Such things make the city of poetry different from the majority of metropolises.

4.

The city of poetry grows from the conviction that poetry is a voice of something without which we could not live. It is something that we feel everyday, it is like air, it suggests the words that we say in the most important moments of our lives – these are words that we lack, the words that we look for in panic, when we feel something very moving and vital, it is something that must be said, even though in our language there are no words for such things. Poetry enters into this empty sphere which is unbearable, because it is a shiver of speech, a metaphor which expresses our fear, our desire, our love. Without this flash of a sudden metaphor we would be convicted to silence or to falsehood in extremely poignant matters, those which are intimate, essential, fully human and therefore momentous. It is the metaphor which, in a very literal way, creates the shape of the world, makes life more intensive, gives the feeling of the goal. The city of poetry is such a metaphor. At the same time, it is a real and tangible space of Lublin.

5.

The City of Poetry is a festival, it is a celebration of spring. We want to show that poetry entering into our daily lives makes it a celebration – cheerful, sudden, flapping, similar to children’s laughter and at the same time full of discreet gravity, just like prayer. We want both these tones to be well heard in the city of poetry.

6.

The City of Poetry aims at teaching the courage of imagination, without which our world would be barren and empty. When the imagination withers, our life easily loses depth, loses meaning and falls into despair. It is the courage of imagination, that adds to our life the significance, strength, meaning and opens it to a greater and deeper meaning, totally different from the one that appears in our everyday existence. It may be discussed in a different way. We may say that our everyday lives, also in its practical dimension, owe much to the courageous imagination. What is derived from it embraces not only its force and significance, but also particular solutions. It is worth remembering about that, it is worth considering the space of imagination, in the city of poetry, in Lublin.

Paweł Próchniak