

A Word from Professor Maria Łoś-Podgórecka

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It is natural that with the passing years, the central stage of various branches of science is taken over by new generations. Only very few of the older scholars continue to live in the collective memory as paragons, providing a vision for the development of the given discipline as well as the values that constitute its ethos.

The past 25 years brought enormous changes in Poland and in the world as well as in sociology as a discipline. The fact that Adam stays in the collective memory 25 years after his passing is reassuring and indicates a lasting need for genuine authority figures.

Young sociologists – and probably some older ones as well – may wonder who was Adam Podgórecki as a person, as an academic and as a mentor to multiple generations of sociologists. In my view, he was above all a good man, but what made him unique was the fact of being a true and exceptionally creative thinker – a man whose mind worked continuously, looking for original answers to questions that fascinated him.

Sometimes these questions and answers were expressed in the literary form of dialogues between Master Si-Tien and his disciples. Sometimes they were translated into the language of science and presented themselves in the form of research hypotheses. And sometimes they appeared seemingly trivial, but vibrated with a brilliant, inimitable sense of humour and always, apart from a joke, conveyed serious, often bitter meaning.

The world of his thoughts, which fascinated and inspired those who knew him will surely continue to be explored and discovered by new generations of sociologists and others.

Despite international recognition and affection towards Canada, Adam did not feel well in the role of *émigré*. He missed Poland deeply and closely followed events in his native land, taking pride in its triumphs and agonising over its disappointments. Poland has become for him a field of sociological observations as well as a source of never extinguished pain.

Multiple publications that appeared after his sudden passing in 1998 portrayed – in addition to his intellectual virtues and academic achievements – his personal traits, such as the remarkable value he attached to friendships, his unique sense of humour, his support for the weaker and at the same time uncompromising condemnation of those who had played an active role in building the communist regime in Poland and after its collapse avoided any accountability and often presented themselves, or were promoted by others, as moral paragons.

Various authors underlined Adam's colourful personality, originality, the depth of his insight and the diversity of his creative legacy. They were not exaggerating. Those, who stressed the great role Adam played in their lives, as a mentor and friend, underlined often that he was a real authority, not an artificially created one. The former Head of the Polish Sociological Association, who had been Adam's student and later a friend, the late Professor Andrzej Kojder, aptly pointed out a number of Adam's unique traits. He wrote,

If there are people who defy categorisation, are incomparable, exceptional, Adam Podgórecki was such a person. His achievements, wealth of ideas, scale of his projects, range of academic interests, extraordinary imagination, incomparable literary style, industry and many other features would be enough to endow multiple people. (...) He fired others with his enthusiasm. His initiatives were being transformed into shared, collective goals. His ideas were contagious even to his opponents." (A. Kojder, *Vita Activa Adama Podgóreckiego*, "Więź" 1999, no. 6, p. 123–132)

Thinking about Adam, one should not forget his love of music. He had a perfect ear and classical music was his great passion. At any given time, there were composers who fascinated him more than others. At various times these included Francis Poulenc, Michael Tippett, Luciano Berio, Olivier Messiaen, Karol Szymanowski and many, many others.

Despite his shattered health, his curiosity about the world and people did not leave him to the very end. He left us too early but continues to live in our memory.

At the end of my short reflections, I would like to thank Professor Krzysztof Motyka for organising this conference to honour my husband. I wish all the authors and participants inspiring and interesting discussions.