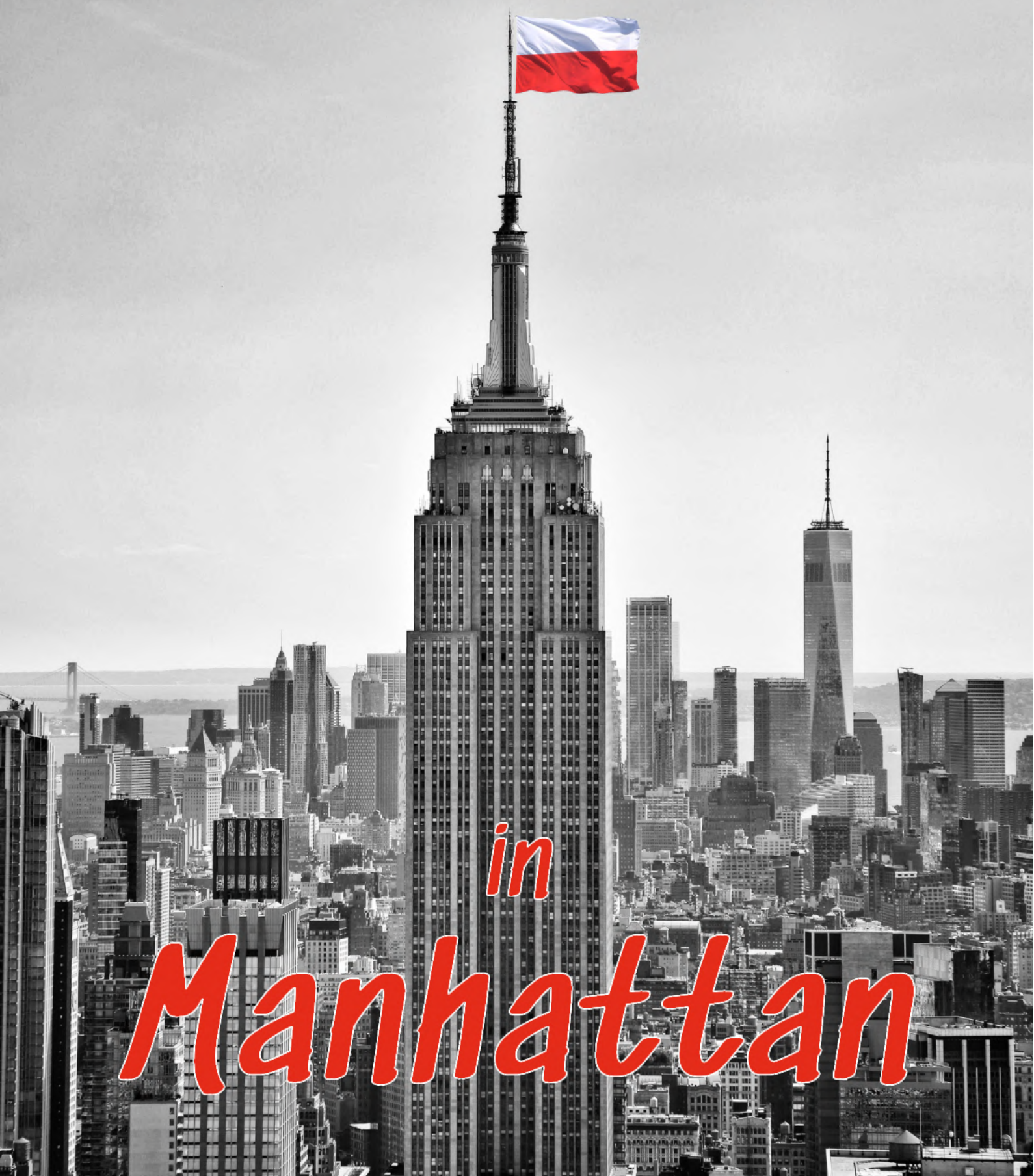


Following Polish Footsteps



in
Manhattan

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Ah, Manhattan!

Called by many the “beating heart” of the World.

The vibrant tapestry of New York City has been enriched by the contributions of numerous Poles who have left their mark in various fields, including literature, music, theater, and visual arts. Since the 1920s, Polish immigrants and their descendants have established a significant presence in the city fostering a cultural legacy that resonates through the streets of New York till today.

After World War I and the establishment of the Second Polish Republic in 1918, it became easier for Poles to seek opportunities abroad. The Great Depression marked a significant period for Polish immigrants in the United States, particularly in major cities like New York, with the US emerging as a particularly promising destination. During that time, Polish immigrants in New York faced both challenges and opportunities leading to the establishment of Polish neighborhoods, particularly in areas like Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and the East Village in Manhattan.



Arriving at Ellis Island

In the arts, the 1920s saw the emergence of Polish writers and artists who began to make their mark in Manhattan, with many prominent Poles living and visiting the City throughout the XX century.

New York City, circa 1932



SKAMANDRYCI



Skamander magazine from the Jan Lechon book collection holds in the PIASA Library

Skamander was a group that emerged after World War I. Its members were instrumental in shaping the identity of Polish literature in the 20th century and their presence in NYC helped to bridge Polish literary traditions with American culture.

One Skamander member was poet JULIAN TUWIM (1894-1953) who primarily lived on the Upper West Side, a vibrant neighborhood of artists and intellectuals which provided him with a stimulating environment, allowing a connection with other Polish emigres and various cultural movements.



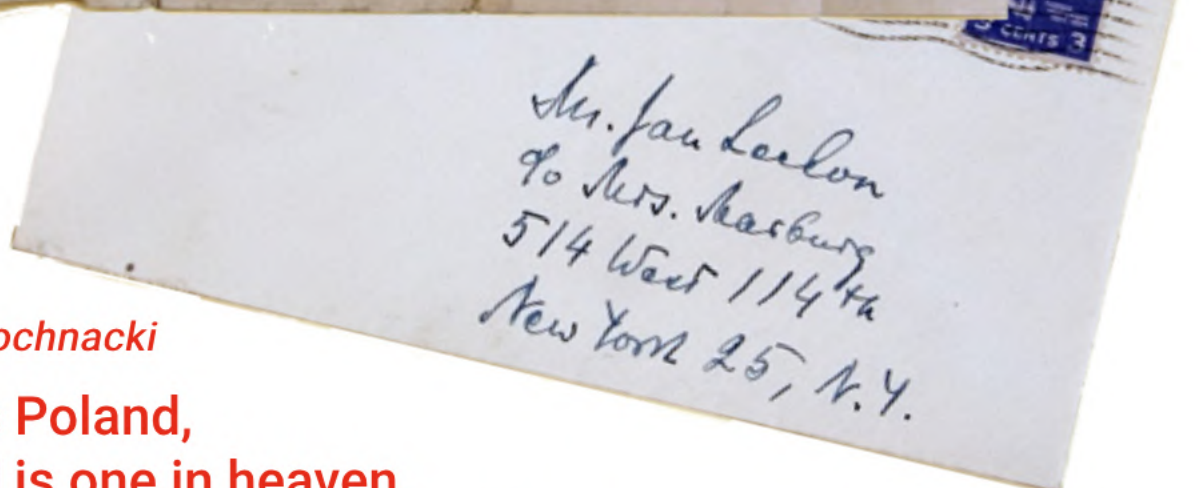
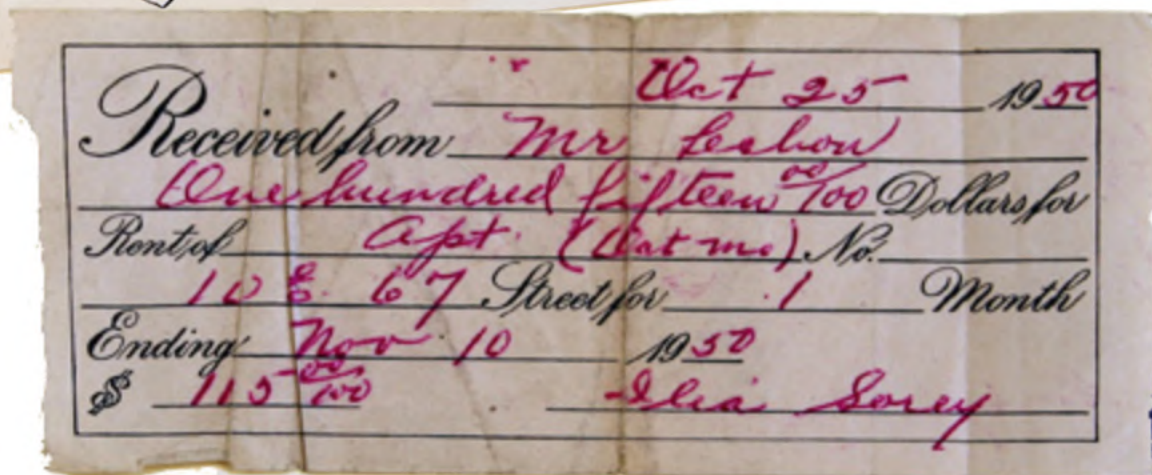
Julian Tuwim by Stanislaw Witkiewicz

In NYC, Tuwim's poetry becomes more urban and modernist, reflecting the hustle and bustle of the City. In his poem, "MIASTO" (CITY) he captures the chaos of urban life, its energy, and his feeling of being an outsider. It displays a shift towards modernist themes, incorporating sounds and rhythms of Manhattan. He experiments with new forms and styles moving away from traditional structures to embrace a freer, more lyrical expression.

JAN LECHON (1899-1956) was a friend of Julian Tuwim and a member of the Skamander group. He resided at several locations in NYC, among them:
 514 West 114th St, 10 East 67th St (1950)
 and 505 East 82nd St.



Documents from the Jan Lechon Collection holds in the PIASA Archives



Jan Lechon *Mochnicki*

"One is Poland,
 as God is one in heaven,
 I sacrifice all my strength to her
 For all the life I have taken from you,
 I belong to you, Motherland."

His poem, “Mochnecki”, expresses a longing for the simplicity of life in Poland, nostalgia, and a deep emotional connection to his homeland. Lechon’s personal reflections on loss and yearning resonated strongly among common folk.

Lechon struggled with feelings of isolation and nostalgia for Poland. His poetry often dealt with longing and identity, feelings familiar to the majority of immigrants.

Lechon faced ongoing challenges related to his mental health exacerbated by his feeling of isolation, which eventually influenced both his personal life and his poetry.

Upper East Side





Henry Hudson Hotel, view from W 57th St.

On June 8, 1956, Jan Lechon met with a documentary film producer at a restaurant in the Henry Hudson Hotel in NYC, asked his companion for \$1.80 to collect his belongings from the laundry, got into the elevator, and then committed suicide.

This marked a heartbreaking end to a life filled with literary achievement. Lechon's death sparked conversations about mental health within the artistic community, prompting a greater awareness of the psychological challenges faced by writers and artists, particularly those in exile.

The Legacy

Lechon left behind a rich legacy in Polish literature. His works continue to be studied and celebrated for their emotional depth and cultural significance.

Lechon and Tuwim's poetry relates to the human condition. Their themes of human experience, including love, loss, and existential reflection, are as relevant today as they were then.

During their time in New York, both poets experienced a significant evolution in their poetry, influenced by their surroundings, cultural exchange, and the themes of exile and identity.

At the New York Public Library in East Village, Jan Lechon and Kazimierz Wierzynski held their first author events after arriving in the City



Among other influential Polish writers, artists, and philosophers who lived in 1940s and 1950s Manhattan for a substantial amount of time, and contributed to the fabric of this City are:

KAZIMIERZ WIERZYNSKI, (1894-1965) a poet essayist, and member of the Skamander group who contributed to various literary magazines, promoting Polish literature.

From left:
Jan Lechon
Halina Wierzyńska
Kazimierz Wierzyński



Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990)



A director and a visual artist who started his American adventure in the East Village. Although he became more prominent later, his early work in the 1940s laid the foundation for his contributions to American theater. Kantor's avant-garde productions influenced the New York theatre scene, culminating in more extensive work in the 1960s.

JAN KARSKI served as a courier for the Polish government. In exile during World War II, he delivered the first official report to the Western Allies about the organized extermination of the Jews by the Germans. He became a prominent figure in 1940s and later moved to New York and eventually to Washington DC where he became a professor at Georgetown University and continued to advocate for Poland, sharing his experiences and stories with the world.



Jan Karski Corner in New York City

JOZEF WITTLIN, poet, essayist and novelist, spent the last 35 years of his life in New York, residing most of that time, with his wife, Dr. Halina Wittlin, and daughter Elizabeth Wittlin Lipton at 4500 Fieldstone Road in Riverdale, New York.

Jozef Wittlin by Emanuel Romano

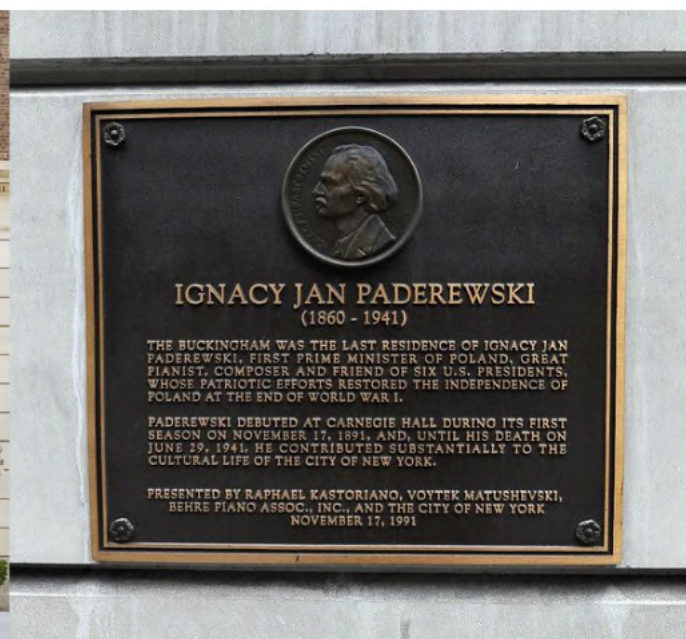
As a writer he is remembered as an uncompromising critic of Poland's post war reality and his name remained on the index of Polish censorship until the end of his life. One of his major works, 1943 "Salt of the Earth" was awarded prizes by the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, rare for a translated novel.



Meeting Paderewski

IGNACY PADEREWSKI (1860 -1941) was one of Poland's most renowned pianist, composer and a statesperson who had a significant impact during his time in America. He emigrated to the US in the late 19th century and settled in NYC. Paderewski resided at 1040 Fifth Avenue and had also utilized hotel suits at The Waldorf Astoria Hotel, The Plaza Hotel, The St. Regis Hotel, and the Hotel Biltmore that still has a plaque dedicated to him.

Plaque dedicated to Paderewski at the Quin Hotel on W 57th Street



Early in his career Paderewski became a prominent figure on the classical music scene. His performances captivated audiences with both exceptional skills as a pianist and a charismatic stage presence. His emotional interpretations and technical prowess were incomparable. Paderewski made numerous appearances at Carnegie Hall in NYC, one of the world's most prestigious venues. His performances there were often met with standing ovations, and he often drew large crowds. His concerts at Carnegie Hall were always sold out (according to the venue) and received significant media attention. Newspapers and music critics often praised Paderewski's ability to connect with the audience, enhancing his reputation as a leading pianist of his time.

Carnegie Hall



During World War I, he organized benefit concerts in the City to raise funds for Polish relief efforts, which also served to galvanize support for Polish independence. His contacts in the White House and friendships with many political figures (among them Herbert Hoover, 31st American President) were instrumental in Poland regaining its independence in 1918. Paderewski briefly served as prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in 1919. He returned to the City in 1941 to fundraise for Polish war efforts. He was 81 at the time and he passed away on June 29, 1941 in Manhattan. His casket was placed for viewing in St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, an honor reserved for very few.

Many notable Poles arrived in Manhattan in the years following World War II into mid-1960s, escaping from or being disillusioned by communism in Poland.



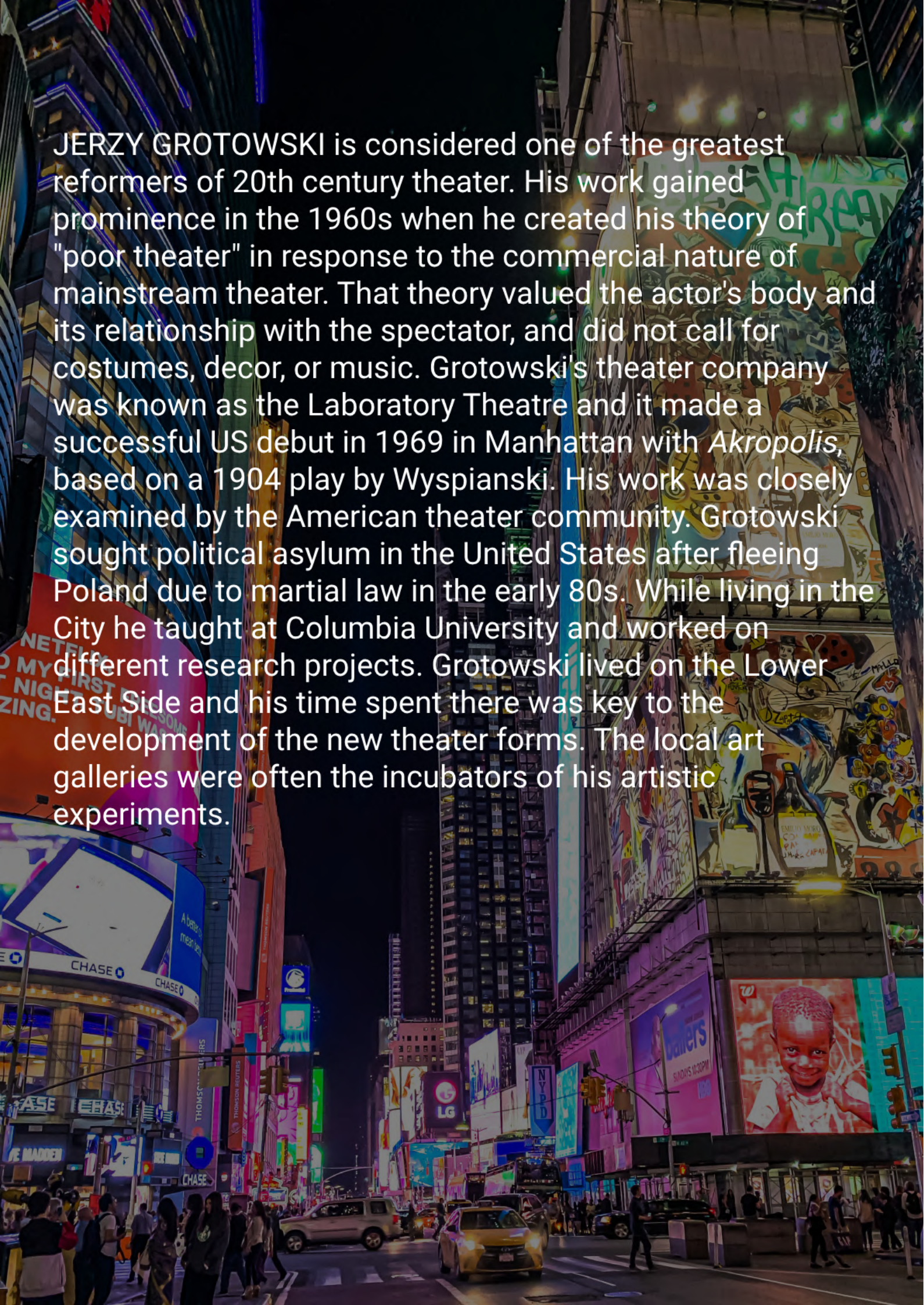
Greenwich Village



The Village Vanguard jazz club

MAREK HLASKO, writer and poet, arrived in Manhattan in the late 50s settling in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side area. Called the Polish James Dean, he was conflicted both in his personal life as well as in his work. Being celebrated as a “rebel” he was the voice of the generation that witnessed the barbarity of the Second World War. While living in the City in early 60’s, he wrote “The Moose” and “The Eighth Day of the Week”, both of which explore the struggles of individuals caught in a rapidly changing world. He died in Germany in 1969 at the age of 35 of an overdose of sleeping pills and alcohol.

CZESLAW MILOSZ (1980 Nobel Prize Winner) came to the United States as a diplomat for the Polish communist government, working at the Polish consulate first in New York City, then in Washington, D.C. In 1950, he was transferred to Paris and the following year he requested and received political asylum. Milosz spent most of his time in California, but made his mark on NYC in 1948, when he arranged for the Polish government to fund a Department of Polish Studies at Columbia University. It was named for Adam Mickiewicz, but the department’s work was discontinued in 1954 when funding from Poland stopped. The Polish Chair was reestablished at Columbia as a part of Slavic Studies.



JERZY GROTOWSKI is considered one of the greatest reformers of 20th century theater. His work gained prominence in the 1960s when he created his theory of "poor theater" in response to the commercial nature of mainstream theater. That theory valued the actor's body and its relationship with the spectator, and did not call for costumes, decor, or music. Grotowski's theater company was known as the Laboratory Theatre and it made a successful US debut in 1969 in Manhattan with *Akropolis*, based on a 1904 play by Wyspianski. His work was closely examined by the American theater community. Grotowski sought political asylum in the United States after fleeing Poland due to martial law in the early 80s. While living in the City he taught at Columbia University and worked on different research projects. Grotowski lived on the Lower East Side and his time spent there was key to the development of the new theater forms. The local art galleries were often the incubators of his artistic experiments.

Jerzy Kosinski (1933–1991) was a Polish American novelist known for his controversial works exploring themes of identity, trauma, and survival. Born in Łódź, Poland, he survived the Holocaust by living under a false identity. After emigrating to the United States in 1957, he gained acclaim and attracted controversy with such novels as "The Painted Bird" (1965), which he presented as being a semi-autobiographical tale of a young boy's experiences during World War II, and "Being There" (1970), a satirical commentary on media and politics.

Living in Manhattan in the 1960s and 1970 placed Kosinski in the center of a vibrant cultural scene and was pivotal in shaping his identity as a writer and his contribution to American literature. Despite his success he had to come to terms with intense scrutiny regarding the validity of his work and personal life.



New York City fire escapes and murals are iconic symbols and landmarks, often seen in films and photographs

His body was discovered on May 4th, 1991, by his wife, Katherina von Fraunhofer-Kosinski. Jerzy Kosinski, who was 57, was found naked in a tub half full of water with a plastic bag tied over his head. A suicide note was left in the office of his apartment, located in a swanky section of West 57th Street near Carnegie Hall.



East Village

The early 1980s in Poland were the times of the Solidarity movement and martial law, which prevented many Poles from returning home.

JANUSZ GLOWACKI was one of them. He was in London in December 1981 for the premiere of his play *Cinders*. He stayed in London after martial law was declared and then moved to NYC in 1982. Awkwardness with English made him reluctant to develop contacts, which cost him work. Lacking money, he dodged rent collectors and struggled to keep afloat. His apartment in the East Village (a neighborhood that was home to many Polish immigrants in this working-class part of Manhattan), was a meeting place for other Poles active in the art scene. Among them was Elzbieta Czyzewska, a well-known Polish actress. The East Village's rich cultural diversity exposed Glowacki to various perspectives and narratives. This was evident in his work where he incorporated elements of identity struggles, immigrant experiences and the complexities of cultural adaptation. The ability to convey serious themes through humor made his plays engaging and accessible, allowing audiences to connect with deeper issues while being entertained.

Upper East Side



Lower East Side



Głowacki's play "Hunting Cockroaches" (1987) was the first to catch the attention of American critics. His play "Antigone in New York" (1993) made him a well-known and respected author. In both plays, Głowacki references the experiences of immigrants who don't find success in America. His other plays: "The Polish Waiter," "The End of the World," and "The Copernicus Effect" were also well received by critics and audiences alike.

MANHATTAN

“The Beating Heart of the World”

Over the years became home to many thousands of Polish immigrants, most of them anonymous, some well-known. There are several notable places in the city that serve our community and celebrate Polish culture and heritage.

Upper West Side

Upper East Side

Midtown

Murray Hill

Greenwich Village

East Village

Lower Manhattan

Lower East Side





King Jagiello Monument in Central Park



The Kosciuszko Foundation



The Polish Consulate



The Polish Consulate



St. Stanislaus B&M Church 101 E 7th St



The Polish Army Veterans Association of America

Elzbieta Czyzewska was a popular Polish theater and film actress and a star of Polish cinema in the 1960s. Her career took a dramatic turn after she married prominent journalist David Halberstam and moved to the United State.



The view of Bryant Park from Sixth Avenue

Overcoming a language barrier and the challenges posed by a new culture, she continued to perform in both English and Polish, appearing in American films, TV shows, and off-Broadway productions.

Czyzewska lived with her husband in an elegant residence notable for its large terrace and a garden on the Upper East Side near 48th Street.



Elzbieta Czyzewska

Following her divorce from Halberstam, Czyżewska moved to an apartment on East 60th Street, near the last Manhattan stop on the subway before it crosses the East River into Queens. She later spent more than two decades in a small apartment on 44th Street, from which she could see Times Square. The apartment, filled with personal items, was and visited only by her closest friends.

Czyżewska remained a charismatic and resilient figure admired for her talent, wit, and indomitable spirit until her death in 2010. In Bryant Park behind the New York Public Library there is a plaque bearing the inscription "Elżbieta Czyżewska 1938-2010, Great Actress, From friends, with love". It can be found on the chair next to the Gertrude Stein monument.



Marie Skłodowska-Curie plaque in City Hall Park

Marie Skłodowska-Curie – a rare female Polish scientist and two-time Nobel Prize laureate - was renowned both internationally and in America, thanks in part to her development of mobile X-rays brought to the front line in France during World War I.

A plaque marking the 67th anniversary of Skłodowska's birth can be seen in City Hall Park. It was unveiled (and a tree planted) in 1934 by then NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses.

City Hall Park, located in downtown Manhattan





Interior of the Polish Consulate

The history of the largest mansion in the Murray Hill area of mid-Manhattan, which is home to the Polish Consulate, is remarkable. In 1902 Joseph Raphael De Lamar, a financier from Holland who made his money from mines in Canada and America, purchased a plot of land on the corner of 37th St and Madison Ave for \$250,000.

He was 59 at the time. De Lamar asked a “mansion architect” C.P. H Gilbert to build him and his young bride a Beaux-Arts style mansion. The building was completed in 1905 at a cost of \$500,000. It has 6 floors with a rooftop dog run and a basement garage accessed by the elevator that raised and lowered vehicles from the street.

Unfortunately, De Lamar’s wife divorced him two years later, leaving him to raise their only daughter.



Interior of the Polish Consulate

The 1920s census taker noted that the mansion was occupied by De Lamar, his child and 12 servants which constituted a “standard 6:1 ratio”. He died in 1918. In 1923 the mansion was sold to the National Democratic Club. In 1973 it was purchased by the Polish Government and in 1975 the mansion was designated a landmark by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Another building noteworthy for both its architectural beauty and its history, is the Van Alen Mansion located at 15 East 65th Street. It has been home to the Kosciuszko Foundation since 1945. One man named STEVEN MIZWA, the founder of KF, had a vision and a plan. When Margaret Patterson put the mansion on the market following her husband's Rufus death, the asking price was \$250,000. Steven Mizwa incredibly was able to convince Margaret to lower the price to \$85,000 (after six months of negotiations). He convinced her to utilize the residence as headquarters for the Kosciuszko Foundation and for cultural and educational purposes.



The Kosciuszko Foundation on 15 East 65th Street in New York

The Kosciuszko Foundation on 15 East 65th St.



A down payment of \$10,000 in cash was secured, mostly by donations from the Polish immigrant community. An interesting twist was that Steven Mizwa also approached African American communities in the South to raise the money. He wrote letters to organizations and schools reminding them that Tadeusz Kosciuszko – a hero of both nations – stipulated in his will that all proceeds from the sale of his land and property in America should support the education and welfare of freed slaves and promote the cause of freedom and equality. Substantial donations followed, and the bank mortgage taken to purchase the mansion was paid off within 5 years through the generosity of Margaret Patterson and Stanislaw Petera, who had retired from General Electric. The mansion became a cultural center for the Polish diaspora - hosting events, exhibitions, concerts and lectures. It remains a vital and vibrant part of the Polish Community.

Today, many who visit Central Park see and read about a great king and learn a sliver of Polish history.

The KING JAGIELLO Monument in Central Park overlooks the Turtle Pond near The Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was created by sculptor Stanislaw Ostrowski and depicts a scene from the 1410 Battle of Grunwald when the King received two swords from his enemy, the Teutonic Knights of the Cross. The monument shows King Jagiello raising two swords above his head while standing in the stirrups of his horse. The monument was created for the 1939 World Fair in Queens and was donated to the City in 1945 by the Polish Government in Exile.

King Jagiello Monument in Central Park





PIASA Library in the building at 30th St. – 3rd floor

The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America traces its history back to 1942. The outbreak of World War II forced many scholars and scientists to emigrate to America. Among them were members of the Polish Academy of Learning (Polska Akademia Umiejetnosci) in Krakow: Oskar Halecki, Wacław Lednicki, Bronisław Malinowski, Jan Kucharczyński, Wojciech Świątosławski and Rafał Taubenschlag. In 1942 they decided to establish PIASA. The Institute was registered in New York City on May 1, 1942 to continue promoting Polish arts and sciences in the US.

PIASA Gallery in the building at 30th St. – 1st floor





PIASA's first headquarters

were located in a private residence of Herbert Livingstone Satterlee (rent free) at 37 East 36th St. After his death the Institute rented office space at 39 East 35th St and later at 59 East 66th St.

In 1986 PIASA purchased its permanent residence at 208 East 30th St in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan.