

Family as a Place of Ignacy Jan Paderewski's Upbringing. One of the Creators of Polish Independence

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I. J. Paderewski was one of many people, to whom we owe the Polish independence of 1918. He belongs to the group of the most illustrious representatives of his generation. Experiences of home and family of each of those eminent figures were different including their descent, character of their homes, individual experiences in distinct social strata as well as various family constellations. It is an exceptional class of people coming from the generation raised in homes of national independence traditions and insurrection representing the whole spectrum of opinions and political views. Despite significant differences they were connected by insatiable desire to regain full independence and national sovereignty. Owing to their dedication to their homeland, their fortitude, talents and enormous determination, they had achieved what was just an unfulfilled dream to their predecessors.

Key words: *family; Paderewski; biography; early experiences; restoration of Poland's independence*

Family is a primeval community, a fundamental cradle of culture. It was of a special value in the Polish society of XIXth century. As opposed to the brutal demolition of the institution of the Polish state, persecutions and repressions of any national activity, it became, along with the Catholic Church, an exceptional space shaping the generations of young Poles. Within the realm of familial community, a unique place for nurturing freedom and patriotic attitude has been created. It was especially viable for the society that had functioned for over 100 years under foreign Partitions. In consequence, the role of the family became even more crucial than in other countries, especially those enjoying independence.

The aim of the article is to show experiences from the childhood and youth as well as an attempt to interpret the importance of impact of the family and origin on shaping the attitude and character of Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the subsequent creator of independent Poland. He belongs to the group of extraordinary Poles raised in thraldom, who largely contributed to restitution of the Poland's independence.

For the purpose of deconstruction of his childhood and youth, I have used information drawn from the selected biographies of this eminent national leader. In order to analyse Ignacy Jan Paderewski's experiences, the following areas of his life were taken into account: the active opposition against the occupier by the particular family members, experience of the military control as a child, role of the father, stories and family myths. In case of I. J. Paderewski, knowledge of his childhood and youth is quite scarce. Many authors writing about this distinguished artist and politician refer to the fundamental source, which is the biography dictated by Mary Lawton.¹

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941) was a renowned musician, pianist, composer, political leader. He became acknowledged as one of the most preeminent pianist in the world.² His arrival to Poznań in December 1918 turned out to be the reason for an outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising. He was a delegate for the Parisian conference finishing the World War I, a negotiator between two extreme political wings: Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski. He used his artistic talent, interpersonal skills and the ability to bond with other people.

He was born on the 6th of November 1860 in Kuryłówka in Podolia.³ His mother died few months after his birth. A few years later after the January Uprising, his father, who had not had taken part in the battle, was imprisoned for a year having been accused of storing the gun. The children, Ignacy and Antonina were looked after by their aunt.⁴ Jerzy Waldorff, enthusiast of Paderewski's work, described this part of his life in the following way: the boy and his 5 years older sister Antonina are being looked after by the family, being moved around from one polish court to another. These courts having been renowned of a romantic nationalism and weakly rooted in harsh political reality were later described by Conrad Korzeniowski via stories from visits at Ignacy's uncle Bobrowski in Ukraine. This effusive atmosphere covered in gloomy tales of insurrectional defeats became a form of patriotic nursery for a highly sensitive, precocious boy, who displayed musical talent early on.⁵

Having been incarcerated, Ignacy's father lost his job and house. After leaving penitentiary, he was hired as an administrator in other affluent family in Sudytkiv near Shepetivka.⁶ One of his biographers said: I. J. Paderewski originated from the

¹ Paderewski I. J. (1965). *Pamiętniki*, Spisała Mary Lawton, Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne.

² *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN*. (1996). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, vol. 4, pp. 728–729.

³ Popielówna S. (1932). *I. J. Paderewski*, Kraków, p. 5.

⁴ Landau R. (1935). *J. I. Paderewski*. Warszawa: Wydaw. J. Przeworskiego, p. 15.

⁵ Waldorff J. (2012). *Wygrał Polskę na fortepianie*. In: *Ignacy Jan Paderewski – artysta, społecznik, polityk w opiniach jemu współczesnych*. Warszawa: Centrum Europejskie Natolin, vol. 1, p. 291.

⁶ Zamoyski A. (1992). *Paderewski*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, p. 16.

nobility from Podlachia that getting more and more poor turned to estate lease. "My family – as he recounted – brought forth landowners i.e., farmers, doctors, administrators, teachers, thereby people of high level of intelligence and social skills."⁷

Childhood, youth and adulthood of I. J. Paderewski fell for the post insurrection period. Despite the scarcity of the financial goods, his father cared about Ignacy and his sister's education. From age of 4 to 12, Ignacy was home educated by the teachers and French governess. "Initially he learned music passionlessly. Luckily, his innate talent was noticed by his father and his first teachers, which did not discredit his future education."⁸ He was not enjoying an opinion of the wonderful child, though. As a 13-year-old boy, he left the family home in Podolia to never come back.⁹

His childhood had never been fully happy. He was very early devoid of maternal care, temporarily separated from his father due to his imprisonment and later on when he was seeking a new job. It must be added that in those days, relationships between a father and a child were not fond and cordial, but rather characterized by distance between a father and a son.¹⁰ "Ignacy was a sensitive boy and in the setting he was in, he started to become melancholic. He was missing his mother, and his father being incarcerated made his fear of loneliness more profound. As the time went by, he became more aware of poverty and general difficulties he was surrounded by. He started to appreciate hard work of his father, who struggled to provide for his family."¹¹ His father got married again shortly afterwards. His wife was Anna Tańkowska, a widow, burdened by a bunch of children. She came to Paderewski's house with her father and several relatives.¹²

A polish child had not had much of a chance in building a career in the Russian Empire. The only way to succeed was leaving polish environment and converting to Orthodoxy. The only alternative path of career was that of art and Ignacy's father thought of it as an opportunity for his children and hired the old violinist, Runowski, to teach them. When their father was arrested, their aunt also watched over their continued music education.¹³ In 1871 Ignacy and Antonina participated in the charity concert and subsequently matinees arranged by the wealthy bourgeoisie. As a consequence, Ignacy was enrolled to the Warsaw Conservatory at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music.¹⁴ Jerzy Waldorff, a writer, critic,

⁷ Bokszańska G. (1993). *Polityka – Biografia – Przywództwo socjologiczne studium przywódczej kariery Ignacego I. J. Paderewskiego*. Łódź: Politechnika Łódzka, p. 80.

⁸ Popielówna S. (1932), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹ Sidorowicz B. (1924). *J. I. Paderewski. Życie i dzieła*. Poznań: Towarzystwo Akcyjne PAR, p. 9.

¹⁰ Wapiński R. (2009). *Ignacy Paderewski*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, p. 12.

¹¹ Zamoyski A. (1992). *Paderewski*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, pp. 16–17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–29.

essayist and an avid enthusiast of I. J. Paderewski's work commented on this in the following way: "the father mobilized all possible financial resources in order to bring his son to the Warsaw Conservatory in 1872."¹⁵ Ignacy graduated from the Conservatory not without any difficulty. I. J. Paderewski was a courageous young man. As a 15-year-old boy he embarked on a tournée to Russia with his friend, cellist, which turned out to be a complete failure. They returned home penniless and prostrated, but enriched by the new life and artistic experience. According to his biographer's words: "In 1878 having had graduated from the Conservatory, Paderewski (...) took up the job as a piano teacher at his *alma mater*. Two years later, he married his own student Antonia Korsakówna, who died giving birth to his son Alfred. This son, crippled since birth, being very much loved by his father, was his greatest concern. He was carried from one sanatorium to another till his death at the age of 21."¹⁶

After I. J. Paderewski graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory, he pursued to master his skills of composition and instrumentalization in Berlin. Subsequently, he started to give concerts in the largest European capitals. His performances received a great acclaim in Vienna (1887), Paris (1888) and U.S.A, where he played a tour of 117 concerts.¹⁷

After the outbreak of World War I, I. J. Paderewski began to engage in providing the aid to the victims of the war in Poland. He gave passionate speeches, which he definitely revealed talent for. He evolved into an eminent artist, becoming remarkably popular in the U.S.A. "Against this backdrop and simple worship of a multimillion group of Polish emigrants, Ignacy Paderewski could insist on one of his friends, the President of the United States – Woodrow Wilson – to enlist the 13th point proclaiming the independence of Poland in the peace terms called Fourteen Points."¹⁸

Ignacy Jan Paderewski's father was imprisoned for a year for favouring the January Uprising in 1863. He faced the charges of storing the gun for the insurgents by the tsarist authorities. In turn, his mother Poliksena, née Nowicka, was a daughter of Professor at the Vilnius University.¹⁹ She was born in Kaługa, where her father was exiled after the November Uprising.²⁰ "Ignacy's grandfather, Professor at the Vilnius University exiled to Siberia having spoken his dreams of Poland restoring its independence out loud. Before Ignacy even learned to speak and write, the word 'freedom' bore a profound meaning to him, it was a noble word."²¹

¹⁵ Waldorff J. (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 291.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 292–293.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

¹⁹ Śladowska M. (2008). *Ignacy Jan Paderewski pianista, kompozytor, mąż stanu*, Warszawa: Wyd. DiG, p. 1.

²⁰ Drozdowski M. M. (2001). *Ignacy Jan Paderewski*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo sejmowe, p. 12.

²¹ Landau R. (1935). *J. I. Paderewski*, Warszawa: Wydaw. J. Przeworskiego, p. 15.

When Ignacy was 8 years old, his father brought his distant relative, Michał Babiński back home. He was an insurgent from 1830, who lived in the exile for 30 years. He became a private teacher of his children. He exerted a substantial influence on Ignacy. They became fond of each other and the boy grew to have the desire to “become someone” and “do something for Poland.”²²

The particularly specific experience Ignacy had as a child was the imprisonment of his father. It was a traumatic incident for a child. He related this event in the following way years after it happened: “I remember everything what happened that day when they came to take him away. Suddenly, Cossacks surrounded the house and no one was allowed to leave it till the thorough inspection was carried out. There were many of Cossacks, maybe 150 of them, everyone on horseback. I, as a small boy, had an impression of them as being inordinately big and formidable.”²³ When they were taking his father away, a 3-year-old Ignacy having asked about his father was beaten up by one of them with a knout (a kind of whip). This lash was remembered by him till the day he died. “This first encounter with Russian authority had shaken me deeply for the rest of my life. The lashes were painful, cut through my skin, (...) hurt my soul.”²⁴

One of the earliest biographers of I. J. Paderewski wrote: “The most crucial traits of I. J. Paderewski’s character were shaped – as it usually occurs – in childhood and youth. Amongst the most significant one was the permanent identification with the nation, which was expressed by highlighting his Polishness (...). Patriotism that was instilled by his father and teacher transpired to be a dominant feeling that was reflected in his daydreams from childhood about making a change in his country’s fate.”²⁵ However, on balance, it must also be pointed out that relationship with his father was not the most uncomplicated one. The modest biographical accounts reveal that Jan Paderewski was initially absent in his son’s life because of his arrest and search for a job. He then got married soon afterwards, put his wife with her children and numerous family members up in his house, which changed the whole atmosphere of family life for Ignacy and his sister. Ignacy recalls his step-mother as a warm-hearted woman. As a 13-year-old boy, he was sent by his father to the Warsaw Conservatory. On dictating his biography to Mary Lawton many years thereafter I. J. Paderewski mentioned: “It is difficult to recollect what I felt after so many years. What I recall is that I was a little terrified about this project.”²⁶ Later on, as a teenager, Ignacy was not given permission to return home when he was experiencing complex time in his education. His father did not approve of Ignacy’s decision to get married, he did not attend the wedding

²² Zamoyski A. (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²³ Paderewski I. J. (1965), *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.

²⁴ Paderewski I. J. (1965), *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 32.

²⁵ Popielówna S. (1932), *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²⁶ Paderewski I. J. (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 55.

ceremony and even missed his wife's funeral, which was especially hard for his son. He bore this deeply rooted trauma in himself.

Family stories and myths

Paderewski was very young when he learned to read and write. An anecdote circulating in the family said that as a 4-year-old boy he formulated the first letter to his father when he was in prison. He was the only one in his family to learn to speak Russian. He used to read the newspapers in Russian and books in Polish to his family. "My listeners liked my descriptions of the war as many of them remembered the Napoleonic campaign from 1812 and discussed it till then. These conversations largely contributed to the development of my patriotic attitude and earnest desire to prove myself helpful to my homeland. There were two generations of revolutionaries in our home: one of them was represented by my old educator – Babiański, the second – by my father. Apart from that, many of our friends came to us from the neighbourhood. They were freed and returned from Siberia or other places of exile; all of them exerted great influence on my childish mind."²⁷

Early experiences shape our whole life. Ignacy Jan Paderewski was a half-orphan, who lost his mother in his infancy, being temporarily raised by his aunt, he left his family home early on. His life was full of losses and difficulties, which included: death of his wife at the age of 20 when giving birth to his son, handicapped son who suffered from muscle atony of legs, death of his brother in Polish Legions (1914). On the other hand, his father appreciated his musical talent and facilitated his development in this regard. Despite the fact that his life was tainted with pain, he succeeded to build a remarkable career, reach the peaks of virtuosity and popularity in Europe and U.S.A. Using his versatile skills: linguistic, oratorical, artistic, communication and his contacts as well as his exceptional and charming personality, he largely contributed to restoration of Polish independence and protection of its sovereignty.

²⁷ Paderewski I. J. (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 53.