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Łódź, a City of Migrants Its Theatrical Representation in Wiktor Dłuzniewski's Play *Wyprawa do Ameryki*

Abstract

The author analyses Wiktor Dłuzniewski's drama *Wyprawa do Ameryki* (Journey to America) in the context of social themes present in Polish realistic drama in the first half of the 19th century. She focuses on the process of economic migration, a new type of protagonist—*homo novus*, the settler/migrant/stranger—and the setting of the play, i.e. the city of Łódź in the first half of the 19th century. Among the many descriptions and literary interpretations of Łódź, only a few works, including *Wyprawa do Ameryki*, refer to its rise as a result of the influx of migrants or to the complex social and ethnic relations this entailed.

Keywords

theatre in Łódź, theatre and migration, Polish dramaturgy in 19th century

Abstrakt

Łódź – miasto migrantów: Obraz teatralny na podstawie sztuki Wiktora Dłuzniewskiego *Wyprawa do Ameryki*

Autorka analizuje dramat Wiktora Dłuzniewskiego *Wyprawa do Ameryki* w kontekście tematyki społecznej obecnej w polskiej dramaturgii realistycznej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku. Zwraca szczególną uwagę na proces migracji zarobkowej, nowy typ bohatera – *homo novus* osadnika/migranta/obcego oraz na miejsce akcji sztuki – Łódź pierwszej połowy XIX wieku. Wśród wielu opisów i literackich interpretacji przestrzeni tego miasta tylko nieliczne utwory, w tym *Wyprawa do Ameryki*, odnoszą się do początków jego powstania związanych z napływem migrantów – skomplikowanymi relacjami społecznymi i narodowościowymi.

Słowa kluczowe

teatr w Łodzi, teatr i migracja, dramaturgia polska w XIX wieku

In early 20th-century journalism, comparisons between Łódź and Manchester became increasingly common. The term “Polish Manchester” was first used by Henryk Vimard, a French correspondent for the monthly magazine *Revue pour les Français*, who gave this title to a series of articles published from May 25, 1910. On June 1, this collection was published in Polish translation in the Łódź newspaper *Rozwój*.¹ Historians Katarzyna Badowska, Tomasz Cieślak, Krystyna Pietrych, and Krystyna Radziszewska suggest that the comparison of Łódź to Manchester stems from the proximity of the dates of the outbreak of the workers’ revolution in both places. According to another hypothesis, the comparison of the cities was largely due to the similarly rapid development of a textile monoculture. This process was accompanied by brutal capitalism.²

Delving deeper into the French reporter’s account, it is worth noting his description of the city’s inhabitants:

There are no national traditions, national memories, or monuments to former glory here, but rather the sad realization that the main and most flourishing center of economic life in the country belongs to foreigners.³

This observation could have prompted the journalist, who probably had extensive knowledge of the social changes of the late 19th century, to compare Łódź to an American city. From the mid-century onward, reports from transatlantic journeys were eagerly published in the press. In Poland, one of the most notable examples was Henryk Sienkiewicz’s series *Listy z podróży do Ameryki* (Letters from a Trip to America), which appeared in *Gazeta Polska* between February 1876 and December 1878. In the context of this article, Sienkiewicz’s description of New York is particularly relevant:

At first glance, it is not a city inhabited by a particular nation, but a vast aggregation of merchants, industrialists, bankers, officials; a cosmopolitan hive that impresses with its size, bustle, and industrial civilization, but it also wearies with the one-sidedness of a social life that produces nothing but money.⁴

¹ Henryk Vimard, *Łódź, Manszester polski* (Łódź: Biblioteka “Tygla Kultury,” 2001).

² Katarzyna Badowska, Tomasz Cieślak, Krystyna Pietrych, and Krystyna Radziszewska, eds., *City of Modernity: Łódź* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2023), 9.

³ Vimard, *Łódź*, 16.

⁴ Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Listy z podróży do Ameryki* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1956), 65.

Sienkiewicz perceived the American metropolis, much like Vimard viewed Łódź, as a city with an undefined identity. Both writers emphasised the anational character of both cities and drew attention to their rapid development, stimulated by the influx of migrants. The origins of Łódź as a metropolis resemble the history of New York and many other large American cities.

It was precisely this experience of complex relations among newcomers, settlers, and migrants from Prussia, Silesia, and other parts of Western and Central Europe that became the foundation of Wiktor Dłużewski's drama *Wyprawa do Ameryki*. The work was written in 1857, as indicated by the final line of the manuscript discovered by Aniela Kowalska in 1966 in the Jagiellonian Library, among materials left behind by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski.⁵ Dłużewski's text has generally been interpreted by historians and literary scholars as an important document of social relations.⁶ To date, however, it has not been examined from the perspective of historical or theatrical research, which is why it remains virtually unknown to theatre studies scholars. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to those elements that place the drama within the tradition of Polish realist drama of the first half of the 19th century. The key features of this trend included an interest in social reality and everyday life, existential concerns, and the use of observation as a structuring principle of the represented world. It was within this context that the so-called "dramaturgy of money"⁷ emerged, introducing a new type of protagonist—*homo novus*. Ewa Partyga refers to him as the "new human."⁸ This *homo novus* was typically a wealthy entrepreneur, a newcomer, and therefore usually a migrant. Dobrochna Ratajczakowa has noted that "realist drama was not a neutral reflection of reality—it carried critical and ethical potential."⁹

Although Dłużewski's play is not a work of exceptional artistic merit, it is nevertheless pioneering. A decade before the first realist dramas appeared, he addressed major social issues, depicting the everyday life of the lower strata of the Łódź community: hard labor, exploitation stemming from capitalist

⁵ Aniela Kowalska, "Nieznany łódzki utwór sceniczny o 'ziemi obiecanej,'" *Prace Polonistyczne* 22 (1966): 3–17.

⁶ Jolanta Fiszbak, *Mity 'ziemi obiecanej' w regionalnej literaturze Łodzi: Między grą wyobraźni, fikcją literacką a historią* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2013).

⁷ Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, "Dramat i *quinta essentia*, piąty żywioł świata," in *Pieniądz w literaturze i teatrze: Materiały z sympozjum "Temat pieniądza w literaturze i teatrze"*; Uniwersytet Gdański; Gdańsk 17–18 stycznia 2000, ed. Józef Bachórz (Sopot: Pracownia "Impuls", 2000), <https://literat.ug.edu.pl/pieniazd/0005.htm>.

⁸ Ewa Partyga, *Wiek XIX: Przedstawienia* (Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszkowskiego, 2016), 200–263.

⁹ Ratajczakowa, "Dramat i *quinta essentia*," 4.

mechanisms, and sociopolitical circumstances, such as mass migration—often referred to as settlement.

Dłużewski constructs two basic types of characters. The protagonist, Anastazy Podhalski, is clearly the author's alter ego. His surname signals Polish origins, and his social position as a respected teacher situates him within the local community. The other figures are migrant settlers: on the one hand, poor weavers (Taberloch, Rainaffe), and on the other, members of the upper classes who achieved financial success thanks to favorable migration conditions, hard work, but also ruthlessness. These include the pharmacist Goehle, the veterinarian Jesse, the school principal Narwal, and a representative of the Jewish diaspora, the merchant Cypele—described as a “beauty merchant.” Among the central issues emphasized in the drama is migration as a driving force that decisively shaped the city's social and economic structure in the 19th century.

Łódź, a City of Migrants

The defining phenomenon of 19th-century Łódź was its multicultural character,¹⁰ eagerly promoted today, but rooted above all in the mechanisms that produced it—namely, the rapid influx of migrants that caused the city's population to increase several hundredfold within a relatively short period. Historians of Łódź¹¹ distinguish two stages of colonization in this process. The first was rural colonisation, which occurred during the Prussian partition (1795–1807).¹² According to Vimard, Łódź at the end of the 18th century, then still a rural

¹⁰ By using the term “promoted multiculturalism,” I refer to the phenomenon of the excessive valorization of Łódź's multicultural past, which is evident both in scholarly discourse and in social, cultural, and artistic practices. In recent years, a significant increase in publications addressing the city's multicultural character has been observed; cf. Aleksandra Krupa-Ławrynowicz and Katarzyna Orszulak-Dudkowska, eds., *Miasto—mozaika: Opis kulturowy* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2023); Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Lodz: Geschichte einer multikulturellen Industriestadt im 20. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2022). It is also worth noting an earlier study: Marek Koter, Mariusz Kulesza, Wiesław Puś, and Stefan Pytlaś, eds., *Wpływ wielonarodowego dziedzictwa kulturowego Łodzi na współczesne oblicze miasta* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2005). This trend is evident in the changing names of cultural events. For instance, the Festival of the Dialogue of Four Cultures has evolved into the Łódź Festival of Four Cultures and is now known as the Łódź Festival of Many Cultures. While these initiatives play a significant role in promoting intercultural dialogue, they often emphasize the uniqueness of the Łódź experience. This perspective overlooks the fact that similar processes of establishing multiethnic and multicultural societies occurred in various industrial centers during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is crucial to highlight that Łódź's multiculturalism arose from dynamic migration and industrialization processes, rather than from any intentional policy of integration.

¹¹ Cf. Kazimierz Badziak “Ludność Łodzi 1820–1914: Dynamika rozwoju, stosunki narodowościowe i wyznaniowe,” in *Łódź wielowyznaniowa: Dzieje wspólnot religijnych do 1914 roku*, ed. Kazimierz Badziak et al. (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014).

¹² Marcin Wójcik, “Rozwój osadnictwa wiejskiego w województwie łódzkim,” *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Geographica Socio-Oeconomica*, no. 8 (2008): 118.

settlement, “had 190 Christian inhabitants, 11 Jews, and 33 houses . . . 44 barns, 4 public wells, 4 private wells, and one water mill.”¹³ A significant demographic transformation came only with the second stage of colonization—the influx of settlers: artisans, craftsmen, and weavers arriving from the Prussian partition and other German-speaking regions, including Württemberg, Baden, Bavaria, the Rhine provinces, Saxony, and Silesia. This wave of migration led to a dramatic increase in population. Oskar Flatt, a journalist and author of the first description of Łódź published in 1853, characterized this turning point in the city’s development as follows:

In June 1823, there were no craft workshops in Łódź, no foreign manufacturers lived there, and in December of that year, in areas where grain was still being harvested in July, we find six new two-family houses and nine master tailors’ workshops in full swing, brought in straight from Grünberg, Silesia.¹⁴

The reasons for migration to what is now Łódź were favorable economic conditions and numerous privileges and guarantees that settlers received from the authorities of the Kingdom of Poland.¹⁵ One of the first decisions made by the governor of the Kingdom of Poland, General Józef Zajączek, was the document issued on March 2, 1816, entitled *On the settlement of serviceable foreigners, manufacturers, craftsmen, and farmers in the country*. On this basis, “serviceable foreigners” settling in Poland—persons with no criminal record—were, among other things, exempt from taxes and all public obligations, including military service (together with their sons), for six years. They also did not pay customs duties at the border between the Kingdom of Poland and the Prussian partition for imported goods.¹⁶ In areas designated for settlement, they received land on a perpetual lease.

In addition, the authorities of the Kingdom of Poland guaranteed migrants the right to establish institutions and associations similar to those that had

¹³ Vimard, *Łódź*, 9.

¹⁴ Oskar Flatt, *Opis miasta Łodzi pod względem historycznym, statystycznym i przemysłowym* (Warszawa, 1853), 61–62.

¹⁵ The Kingdom of Poland, established in 1815 by the decision of the Congress of Vienna from the lands of the Duchy of Warsaw (excluding the Grand Duchy of Poznań), was an agricultural country; therefore, its industrialization, pursued through a protective state policy, became a priority for the authorities. Cf. Justyna Bieda i Dorota Wiśniewska-Jóźwiak, “Warunki osadnictwa w Łodzi w I połowie XIX wieku w świetle składanych protokołów deklaracyjnych,” *Studia z Dziejów Państwa i Prawa: Badania nad rozwojem instytucji politycznych i prawnych* 16 (2013): 183–200.

¹⁶ Cf. Piotr Szkutnik, “Sporządzanie użytecznych cudzoziemców: Osadnicy w zachodniej części Królestwa Polskiego w pierwszej połowie XIX w. na przykładzie przodków autora,” *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 61, no. 3 (2013): 409.

existed in the communities from which they came. Oskar Flatt described the specifics of Łódź in the first half of the 19th century as follows:

The very character of [the city of Łódź]—how different it is from our other towns! At first glance, Łódź bears the distinct marks impressed upon it, on the one hand, by the overwhelming majority of its German population, and on the other, by the influence of industrial life; one might believe that we are in the midst of German factory settlements, as the company, clubs, and spirit here are purely German.¹⁷

When writing about the “German spirit,” the author underscores the dominant position of settlers arriving from the West. Still, it is impossible to speak of the ethnic or national homogeneity of these newcomers, or of any systematic character to the successive waves of migration. What remains clear is that they had a significant impact on shaping Łódź’s industrial and metropolitan character. Many scholars of Łódź, including Kazimierz Badziak, note that the migrants—who often arrived with substantial movable property, frequently including equipment for newly established workshops—brought professional expertise and, in many cases, formal education.¹⁸ They were the ones who created the city’s middle class. It was from this milieu that the German segment of Łódź’s factory-owning bourgeoisie was later recruited.¹⁹ For the indigenous population of the area, that is, the Poles, the state policy of supporting settlement proved deeply disadvantageous, with the result that class tensions took on a national character. In the first half of the 19th century, Poles occupied the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy in Łódź, while migrants of German origin owned workshops, then small weaving mills, and eventually factories. The Jewish population primarily engaged in trade, although this group also included owners of large industrial enterprises. Wiktor Dłużniewski, acutely aware of these social and economic dynamics, wrote a drama critical of the migration policy of the Kingdom of Poland, which had resulted in what he called “an invasion of Łódź by Germanic elements.”²⁰ As Aniela Kowalska, a scholar of Dłużniewski’s work, observes, “he portrayed Łódź—overwhelmed by foreignness—as a swamp in which people drowned in pursuit of both honest and dishonest earnings.”²¹

¹⁷ Flatt, *Opis miasta Łodzi*, 116.

¹⁸ Badziak, “Ludność Łodzi 1820–1914,” 39.

¹⁹ Badziak, 38.

²⁰ Kowalska, “Nieznany łódzki utwór sceniczny,” 14.

²¹ Kowalska, 14.

Wyprawa do Ameryki—a Drama about Migrants from Łódź

Dłużniewski was a writer and secondary-school teacher associated with Warsaw's intellectual milieu, including "the young Warsaw of 1840–1846, . . . a group of patriotic poets and social activists ahead of their time in their progressive views on the fundamental equality of men and women."²² He lived in Łódź between 1850 and 1858. In addition to the play mentioned above, he also wrote a rhymed legend about the etymology of the city's name, *Paweł Łodzia-Kubowicz: Zdarzenie z pierwszej połowy XVII wieku* (Paweł Łodzia-Kubowicz: An Event from the First Half of the 17th Century), published in 1857, a year before he left Łódź. It is likely that the next work by the first bard of Łódź²³ was a stage piece that, similar to Oskar Flatt's *Opis miasta* (Description of the City), depicted the realities of Łódź in the 1850s. In both works, the pace of Łódź's development was compared to that of cities emerging in the United States at the time. Yet the authors diverged significantly in their assessment of the city's social conditions. Flatt praised the technical progress and economic development—so different from that of other cities in the Kingdom of Poland—and highlighted the industrial character of the metropolis shaped by migrants. Dłużniewski, by contrast, titled his work *Wyprawa do Ameryki* in a tone that reads as decidedly sarcastic, given his portrayal of the ruthless social relations prevailing in the Łódź community. The author of *Paweł Łodzia-Kubowicz* exposed the pathological behavior of characters consumed by greed and obsessed with the prospect of departing for the new "promised land"—America. As Aniela Kowalska writes, for Dłużniewski:

Between the first and the second half of the 19th century, Łódź had already become a center of all kinds of dubious financial speculation, a domain of the supremacy of German and Jewish capital, a gathering place for foreign-speaking populations flowing in like a great wave to an Eldorado, whose machinations corrupted everything around and imposed foreign customs on a land that was originally Polish.²⁴

The researcher analyzed *Wyprawa do Ameryki*, considering the informational value of the drama, while assessing the plot as "essentially weak in terms of content and composition."²⁵ However, she did not fully take into account the

²² Aniela Kowalska, "Wiktor Dłużniewski, autor *Wyprawy do Ameryki*," *Prace Polonistyczne* 23 (1967): 177–178.

²³ Ryszard Kaczmarek, "Wiktor Dłużniewski, pierwszy piewca Łodzi," *Prace Polonistyczne* 12 (1955): 381.

²⁴ Kowalska, "Wiktor Dłużniewski," 170.

²⁵ Kowalska, "Nieznany tódzki utwór," 11.

fact that this work fits well with the realistic tendencies developed in Polish social and moral drama since the 1840s. The plays of the Dłużniewski generation of playwrights (including Józef Korzeniowski and Józef Bliziński) “dominated the Polish theatre scene [only] after 1863, often in close connection with the ideology of positivism.”²⁶

By the end of the 1850s, Dłużniewski had completed studies abroad, collaborated with a group of Warsaw writers, and produced a considerable body of literary work. He was also aware of the trends prevailing in realist comedy of manners. In search of a genre which could faithfully depict the social situation in Łódź while allowing him to maintain a certain distance from it, he chose comedy consisting of scenes from the everyday life of the city’s inhabitants.²⁷ He constructed several scenes depicting mainly simple weavers. Using their original language, a mixture of Polish and German, he enhanced the realism of the images. The incorporation of vernaculars and dialects would only become a hallmark of naturalist dramaturgy toward the end of the 19th century, so in this respect Dłużniewski’s text proved to be pioneering. However, according to Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, it was precisely this “unintelligible language” that was one of the main reasons the manuscript was not recommended for publication.²⁸ On the other hand, a contemporary reading of the text provides further evidence of Łódź’s multicultural origins.

Wyprawa do Ameryki deviates from the traditional structure of drama. As mentioned, it is a series of images from the lives of the inhabitants. The first depicts a group of weavers sitting in a tavern and singing songs, including *Vivat Germania*:

It’s hard to work at the shop,
Always hearing chop, chop, chop.
Weberstube goes tick, then tock,
March to the tavern, here’s nachmittag
Sipping schnapps and beer so strong,
With comrades shouting all along:
Hoch, Vaterland!
Bierbrauerland!

²⁶ Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, “Realizm,” in *Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego*, accessed September 28, 2025, <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/138/realizm>.

²⁷ On the first page, the author mistakenly indicated that it should be “Quotlibet” instead of “Quodlibet.” Cf. Wiktor Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa do Ameryki* (Łódź: eConn, 2012).

²⁸ Kowalska, “Nieznany łódzki utwór,” 9.

Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja,
 Vivat Germania!
 Do you know this land, this earthly paradise
 Where factories roar and hops entice?
 Schwarz-gelb-rothbier, Bavarian pride,
 Land where obese brewers thrive
 Land of potato fare,
 Vodka drinkers everywhere,
 Hoch, Brandweinland,
 Bierbrauerland!
 Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja,
 Vivat Germania!²⁹

The scene introduced the reader to a typical situation from life in Łódź during the first half of the 19th century. The opening lines (“It’s hard to work at the shop, / Always hearing chop, chop, chop”) highlight the fatigue and monotony inherent in the labor of a developing industrial center. The repetitive sound of looms in the workshops, known as *Weberstuben* and evoked through the onomatopoeia “tick tock,” becomes a symbol of industrial routine, alienation, and the loss of meaning in work, which is reduced to mechanical activity. The fragment “Do you know this land, this earthly paradise” serves as a pastiche of Goethe’s famous line from Wilhelm Meister’s *Apprenticeship* (“Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn?”).³⁰ For Dłużniewski, the phrase takes on an ironic tone, functioning as a promise directed at the settlers, whom legislators favored as “serviceable foreigners.” Later in the scene, the weavers sing the traditional German song *Blauer Montag*, recounting the old custom of taking Mondays off. This is an expression of nostalgia for the homeland of their childhood—a form of collective memory and a means of preserving their identity in a new and rapidly changing environment.

Lively on Sundays,
 Meisters, gezelle
 We feast together.
 We live so merrily
 And drink heartily;

²⁹ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, x–xi.

³⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,” in *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 7, *Romane und Novellen II* (München: Beck, 1998), 145.

But each of us
 More than feierabend
 Even Son[n]abend
 More than Di[e]nstag, Son[n]tag
 We cherish our Montag.
 Our blauer Montag
 Tick tock, tick tock,
 Our blauer Montag.³¹

The quoted passages describe the problems faced by settlers who arrived in Łódź many years earlier. Kowalska offers her own interpretation of this scene, portraying the German characters in the drama as “presumptuous, arrogant, still feeling German despite years of living in Poland and the extraordinary favor shown to them by the government of the Kingdom of Poland.”³² She argues that the song *Blauer Montag* expresses “colonial brass and unbridled conceit.”³³ As Jolanta Fiszbak also stresses, anti-German sentiment was widespread in Polish literature beginning in the early 19th century. Shaped by the experience of Germanization policies pursued by the Second Reich in the Prussian partition, this sentiment found particularly forceful expression in Maria Konopnicka’s *Rota* (1908), where the “Teutonic turmoil” and “a German spitting us in the face” become metaphors for historical oppression and national humiliation. Kowalska upholds this discursive framework. Dłużniewski, on the other hand, employs—at times somewhat awkwardly—grotesque and caricatured depictions of German migrants. In doing so, he participates in a broader pattern of national self-affirmation constructed in opposition to the cultural “other”—here not only a political and economic rival but also someone who does not speak a Slavic language. Germans—even when represented as migrant settlers, weavers, or craftsmen—function not merely as social types but also as bearers of a cultural and political code symbolizing expansion. It is therefore more productive to examine the web of relations described in the drama as a typical narrative about migrants, rather than expand on Aniela Kowalska’s biased statements.

The German settlers—the protagonists of the play—feel a strong connection to their homeland and refer to their native traditions: language and popular

³¹ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, xLI–xLII.

³² Fiszbak, *Mity ‘ziemi obiecanej’ w regionalnej literaturze Łodzi*, 101.

³³ Fiszbak.

songs. This indicates a reciprocal relationship between the country they came from and the new place in which they settled. Besides certain informational values (such as references to real figures and place names), Dłużniewski's drama explicitly addresses the issue of migration, points to its economic causes and dysfunctions, and depicts the living conditions in the new environment. The main characters—the weavers Taberloch and Rainaffe—remark that they themselves belong to a subsequent generation of migrants. Rainaffe recalls his family history:

Twenty years ago, the city was not densely populated, but the people were rich. Our parents came here with their belongings, not a penny to their name, but they were offered good jobs by the government, land for a house and a garden, and there were even those who amassed great fortunes in just a few years.³⁴

The weavers did not accumulate any “great wealth,” and thus they dream of improving their living conditions elsewhere—namely, in America. To achieve this goal, they are ready to resort to theft, robbery, and even murder. They know nothing about the country to which they plan to emigrate; they merely hope that “we, poor folks, maybe still have some luck in America.”³⁵ Dłużniewski does not develop the American theme further, nor does he describe the actual experiences of emigrants on the other side of the Atlantic. It is possible, though purely speculative, that he might have been familiar with accounts such as Charles Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* (1844).³⁶ But was it really as the author described? There is no conclusive evidence. Before the Civil War (1861–1865), migration from Polish territories to the United States was minimal. Sources indicate that by 1850, around 494 people had left for America, and between 1851 and 1860, the number rose to 1,164. There was a sharp increase in migration after the January Uprising. In the years 1861–1870, 42,927 migrants left Polish lands for America.³⁷

In Dłużniewski's drama, what matters far more than the imagined America is the portrayal of the various types of immigrants from Łódź. Few individuals who became wealthy quickly can be classified as the new types of characters typical of 19th-century Polish drama. One such character is Goehle—a pharmacist from the first generation of migrants who arrived from German territories. He

³⁴ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, xvii.

³⁵ Dłużniewski, xviii.

³⁶ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, (London, 1850).

³⁷ Wincenty Kotodziej, “Emigracja Polaków do USA i jej etapy,” *Krakowskie Studia Małopolskie*, no. 9 (2005): 185.

appears in only one scene, where he confirms the story told by Taberloch about the origins of his fortune:

In 1820 . . . two wanderers arrived here *per pedes*. Both had been in Berlin at the institute and knew chemistry. They had the desire to become dyers—and were already counting the heaps of money they expected to gather here in a few years. But meanwhile, after rummaging through all their pockets, they did not collect even a whole thaler. What to do here with such a small sum? Then one of them spoke up. Let's buy ourselves a goose. We will live on the meat for a few days, and we will also earn something from the feathers and down. Most importantly, from the grease, I will make a dozen or so jars of various ointments, after we purchase various powders and drugs at the pharmacy for a few pennies. We will even have a tasty soup from the blood. . . . this goose was the foundation of a million-dollar fortune One of them did so well on ointments and medicines that he earned a dozen thalers, and from then on, he took to preparing medicines with his whole soul. . . . Then he went to Warsaw and there, having worked on himself for a couple of years, he came here as an apothecary, while the other became a dyer, and today both are Millionaires.³⁸

Goehle declares: "I was that ointment and medicine dealer, and that dyer was the present heir to several villages."³⁹ His remark—"Poland was the promised land for me; it was the real America"⁴⁰—has secured a lasting place in literary history. In constructing the character of Goehle, based on an actual figure, the playwright created a foil to the teacher Podhalski, who likewise heals, though with herbs and without accepting payment.⁴¹ Kowalska argues that Dłużniewski stages "a game . . . between the Polish teacher, something of a romantic, and a clique of degenerate 'immigrant elements'"⁴² in order to discredit the latter. The author focused on the dialogues between Taberloch and Rainaffe as they devise various criminal schemes. Only a few other characters appear alongside them, and even then, only marginally. The situations sketched in the play do not build toward a climax, and the journey to America never takes place—what is thematized, therefore, is the very process of both realised and planned migration.

³⁸ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, xvii.

³⁹ Dłużniewski, xviii.

⁴⁰ Dłużniewski.

⁴¹ Dłużniewski, xvii.

⁴² Kowalska, "Nieznany łódzki utwór," 11.

The Dramaturgy of Money and *Homo Novus*

Wyprawa do Ameryki fits into a specific trend in Polish drama. It can be called “the dramaturgy of money.” As Dobrochna Ratajczakowa wrote:

The 19th century is the century of the reign of money in stage art, both on the part of the author and in terms of the aesthetics of drama and theatre, aimed at captivating the audience of the day. An entire theatre industry emerges, one that would find talented successors in the following century. [...] Economics proves perfectly suited to bring order to the chaos of the new world, a world of work, play, and revolution in the 19th century, and of play, business, and great wars in the 20th century, when everything is for sale. Art is no exception to this rule.⁴³

Both Ewa Partyga and Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, experts on the 19th century, believe that money determined the nature of the stage and was the main theme of the plays of that period.

Money is the primary common denominator of the events that form the fictional backbone of 19th-century comedy, which often aspired to be called social comedy. It drives many of the period's most popular themes: bankruptcies, speculative schemes, and transactional marriages.⁴⁴

Among the motives mentioned, economic migration is notably absent—that is, journeys to the “promised land” or to America as a financial goal. Ratajczakowa points out that in the realist drama of the second half of the 19th century, “money becomes the fifth element of the world—a force that organizes social, psychological, and existential relations.”⁴⁵ *Wyprawa do Ameryki* demonstrates this mechanism before it becomes fully established in later positivist works. Characters such as Goehle represent a model of social advancement based not only on resourcefulness and pragmatism, but also on cunning—a trait typical of *homo novus*—the hero of modernization. Dłużniewski criticizes these characters, revealing their moral relativism and selfishness. Although Goehle utters only a few sentences in the drama, they become representative of *homo novus*: “Do you know, gentlemen, that today, by handling significant capital, I get 50

⁴³ Ratajczakowa, “Dramat i quinta essentia.”

⁴⁴ Ratajczakowa, 246.

⁴⁵ Ratajczakowa.

or 100 percent? That is why I sold the pharmacy, and now it is no longer I who works for money, but money that works for my enrichment.”⁴⁶ The author of *Wyprawa do Ameryki* presents a character indifferent to social welfare, concerned solely with his own gain. By treating money as a key determinant of social status, he anticipates themes that would later emerge in the works of Bliziński and Bałucki. In doing so, he prefigures a model of realist dramaturgy centered on social tensions.

In the mid-19th century, the ways to get rich were the driving force behind bourgeois dramas. Economic migration, although it was part of the changing social structure, was not taken into account, perhaps because Polish drama, strongly influenced by Romanticism and the Great Emigration, did not treat the phenomenon of migration in economic terms. Limited access to information about the benefits of emigrating overseas (Sienkiewicz’s correspondence dates back to 1878) also did not encourage the exploration of this topic. In Dłużniewski’s work, the theme of migration and its consequences occupy a central place, as migrants in the Łódź community were never neutral figures. They were perceived as outsiders—newcomers from an unfamiliar land, speaking a different language, and embodying a distinct cultural code. Ratajczakowa, in her analysis of the “dramaturgy of money,” highlights characters with foreign-sounding surnames, such as Geldhab, as key drivers of action in many 19th-century dramas.

The presence of the “green-eyed monster” in the 19th century is already signaled by the titles of works: Narzyski’s *Epidemic* (a play about the “stock market plague”), *Febris aurea* by Sarnecki, *Honour and Money* by Ponsard, *For a Little Penny* by Apollo Korzeniowski, and *Fortune or Family Name*, and *Jews* by Józef Korzeniowski. They feature characters whose names already signal their affiliation with the world of money (the banker Goldhunter, who appears in many plays, Fredrowski’s leading character Geldhab, or the supporting character, Account). The key to these dramas is the creation of the stranger or the other.⁴⁷

Not only is the meaning of the surname significant, but also the combination of two German—i.e., foreign—words: the noun *Geld* (money) and the verb *haben* (to have). This method of naming and portraying the character ties back to earlier reflections on the “new human,” often a wealthy migrant. This model of the villain, developed consistently in drama, was brought vividly to life on stage. Ewa

⁴⁶ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, xviii.

⁴⁷ Ratajczakowa, “Dramat i quinta essentia.”

Partyga highlights Narzyski's plays, popular in Warsaw theatres, noting that they "offer a good study of the mechanisms of exclusion . . . of 'new people' and make the theatre a site that serves to perpetuate existing social hierarchies."⁴⁸

This framework was used in *Wyprawa do Ameryki*. Goehle can be regarded as an early, critically rendered example of homo novus—a man of a new era, emerging from capitalist and urbanising transformations. In this drama, the type has not yet been explored in depth psychologically; on the contrary, it remains deliberately biased. Perhaps this is because the residents of Łódź could easily recognize the prototype of the hero in the sparsely sketched character of Goehle.⁴⁹ The author employs this homo novus functionally to highlight the ethical risks tied to the logic of profit, the instrumentalization of interpersonal relationships, and the long-term effects of migration processes, while also disambiguating the social dynamics prevailing in the Łódź community in the mid-19th century.

Conclusion

Wiktor Dłużniewski's *Wyprawa do Ameryki* is part of the process of change in Polish drama, which began in the 1840s and 1850s.⁵⁰ The work can be seen as an early attempt at a realist depiction of social phenomena, characteristic of the transitional period between Romantic individualism and Positivist realism. The aim of this type of drama was to provoke and mobilize public opinion. Polish writers of the first half of the 19th century—and Dłużniewski aspired to be part of this group—actively participated in shaping the discourse on social and moral values that were to determine the functioning of society in an era of economic and political change and influence the future of the nation. As Ewa Partyga observes, the literature and theatre of this period became an arena for debate on social relations, justice, the role of money, and the new bourgeois class.⁵¹ Dłużniewski, like other authors of the social and moral realism movement, drew on his personal experience with economic migration and the capitalist transformation of Łódź, and opposed unfair financial speculation and the "supremacy of German and Jewish capital."⁵²

⁴⁸ Partyga, *Wiek XIX: Przedstawienia*, 201.

⁴⁹ In the manuscript of the drama, Dłużniewski noted in the margin that Goehle, who passed away that month, left an estate of two and a half million. Cf. Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, xvii.

⁵⁰ Partyga, *Wiek XIX: Przedstawienia*, 200–263.

⁵¹ Partyga, 200–210.

⁵² Kowalska, "Wiktor Dłużniewski," 170.

It is worth briefly considering the theatrical life of Łódź during Dłużniewski's time to grasp its complexity. In the mid-19th century, theatre functioned as a social initiative: between 1855 and 1859, more than 100 amateur performances were staged, involving members of the Gesellschaft Thalia, the German-Russian Realschule, and local Polish theatre enthusiasts.⁵³ Łódź's theatrical tradition included amateur and professional troupes of mixed nationalities and a multi-ethnic and multilingual audience. It is difficult to assess whether the adaptation of Dłużniewski's play was possible at that time. The fact is that the author had hoped to stage this play in the theatre in Żytomierz, as we learn from the last page of the manuscript.⁵⁴ Perhaps he counted on the idea that, far from Łódź, reports of the creation of a "moloch city" would be attractive. However, this did not happen because, in the mid-19th century, Łódź—as a symbol of industrial development—was not yet the subject of the widespread interest it would later attract. It was then, thanks to Reymont (and other writers⁵⁵), rather than Dłużniewski, that the ironic comparison of Łódź to the promised land became widespread.

Several elements situate this play within the historical and theatrical context of 19th-century realist drama, with its subject matter being the most significant. The author, seeking to raise awareness of the social phenomena he had observed in Łódź, deliberately chose a theatrical genre that would likely engage contemporary audiences—comedy. From a modern perspective, Dłużniewski's message appears one-dimensional and overtly anti-German, directed against the prominence of migrants in the city's social life. On the one hand, this underscores the major role that migrants, including the German-speaking diaspora, played in shaping Łódź; on the other hand, it reveals a critical stance toward this reality.

Historians examining the history of Łódź commonly use the term "German settlers."⁵⁶ This terminology was also employed in the first volume of *Łódź poprzez wieki: Historia miasta* (Łódź Through the Centuries: History of the City), published in 2023 to mark the city's 600th anniversary. Yet it is worth questioning whether the term—semantically suggesting the completion of a journey and the establishment of permanent settlements—adequately captures the complexity of the city's migration processes. Experiences in the 20th century indicate that

⁵³ Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, *Scena obiecana: Teatr polski w Łodzi 1844–1918* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1995), 65–68.

⁵⁴ Dłużniewski, *Wyprawa*, Lxiv.

⁵⁵ Cf. Badowska, Cieślak, Pietrych i Radziszewska, *City of Modernity. Portal historyczno-krajoznawczy Osadnicy*, accessed October 8, 2025, <https://osadnicy.piotrdolata.pl/>.

⁵⁶ Tadeusz Grabarczyk, ed., *Łódź poprzez wieki: Historia miasta* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2023).

these were not strictly settlers, but rather migrants and their descendants, most of whom had left the city before 1918.



Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

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