

12 November 1951

[1/1] My Beloved Wolf!¹

[1/2] This Saturday I got the letter from you and I was immeasurably gladdened by it. After not getting a reply for an extended period of time, [1/3] I thought you “blocked out your European past”, granted, [1/5] all echoes of the past are unbearable for you, [1/6] they are something like torture and I have to tell you that since [1/7] I intensely lived through similar things, I wouldn’t hold it against you [1/8] if in self-preservation you would silently ignore [1/9] my letter. I even meant to call Rubel² and had he [1/10] confirmed my theory, I wouldn’t bother you any more. I was doubly glad [1/11], because this means “the wounds have healed over” (to put it [1/12] pathetically). On the other hand, however many times I think about the Monstrous [1/13] Atrocities of Germany (have you read Hirschfeld’s book?) and on a smaller [1/14] scale in Katyn³, I am taken aback by the fact humanity went so quickly [1/15] from this to order... It especially unpleasantly manifests itself [1/16] here⁴, where making up with your enemies is the same sort of tradition as [1/17] hanging your allies out to dry.⁵

[1/18] With regard to your limping Polish, it’s nonsense, my [1/19] dear. If you only knew what’s going on with the Polish of our [1/20] emigrants here, your hair would stand up straight. I’d love to send [1/21] your letter to several people as “exemplary prose”.

[1/22] I am sending you a handwritten copy of that small note. If [1/23] you’ll take a look in *Biometrika* you’ll see the reasoning there (very [1/24] good-humored) is especially complicated and you’ll judge the same about [1/25] Kendall. If you judge this has any value, then I [1/26] authorize you to throw out the insignificant things, add something, etc. [1/27], if you’ll have time for it. If you feel something is worth [1/28] adding and if it were to interest you, then also add your

[2/1] name to it. There is also the possibility, that because of actuarial work [2/2] and fighting wars I lost it, and that something stupid is in there [2/3], and so I preferred to discuss it with you, rather than push it [2/4] on the people here. [2/5-18]⁶

¹ A nickname that comes from the similarity between the diminutive for William in Polish, that is, Wilus and wilk, wolf in Polish.

² Ludwik Rubel, the Polish newspaper editor who helped Dr. Birnbaum come to the States by giving him an assignment as a reporter in New York. This confirms his survival of the extensive purge of Polish intellectuals during the early days of the Nazi occupation.

³ Katyn Forest is a wooded area near Gneizdovo village, a short distance from Smolensk in Russia where, in 1940 on Stalin’s orders, the NKVD shot and buried over 4000 Polish service personnel that had been taken prisoner when the Soviet Union invaded Poland in September 1939 in support of the Nazis.

⁴ Here, meaning, in Great Britain.

⁵ This is a reference to the French and British promises to attack Germany if it were to strike Poland.

⁶ This part of the document contains various mathematical equations and symbols. If needed, it can be referenced on the Polish copy of the document.

[2/19] I am waiting for your answers, because I don't want to get [2/20] into some blind alley, when I have a lot of work in school.

[2/21] The biggest sensation for us is Zaremba⁷, who always concerned [2/22] himself with differential equations "im Grossen" and shunned [2/23] applications. He now is writing a work with engineers, and even a [2/24] book on applying topology to study points of osobliwych [2/25] rozwiazan⁸, etc. It's very useful in aerodynamics⁹ and [2/26] some electrical problems. He also had nice results [2/27] in the theory of groups.

[2/28] That's it for now. Sincere greetings for the unknown [2/29] Lady and to the Young Generation from my wife and I, whose [2/30] name is Christy and who comes from the Fraser-Mackintosh family [2/31] from the town where from time to time the Loch Ness [2/32-3] Monster appears! I sincerely wish you a pleasant and fertile Sabbatical work.

Yours,
Zbyszek

⁷ He might be a son and/or relative of famed Polish mathematician Stanisław Zaremba (1863-1942) known for partial differential equations, potential theory (nonsolvability of the Dirichlet problem for certain domains), mathematical physics, crystallography. He was one of the pioneers of direct methods in variational problems for elliptic equations (Dirichlet principle, orthogonal projections).

⁸ This is a highly specialized mathematical term for a specific class of equations.

⁹ After the Second World War, Zbigniew "Zbyszek" Lomnicki worked in the British aircraft industry as an engineer. Nothing is known about him, besides what can be surmised from the letters sent to America after the War.