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Jerzy Hamerski’s “Road” to the Creation and Development of Łejery Pedagogy – Reflection on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Łejery

„Droga” Jerzego Hamerskiego do kształtowania się i rozwoju pedagogiki „łejerskiej” – refleksja z okazji 50-lecia „Łejerów”

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Abstract

Aim. The pedagogical concept of *Łejery*, created in Poznań by Jerzy Hamerski and developed in 1975, places the child in the centre. Primary School No. 83, where Łejery has implemented its vision of democratic education and education through theatre since 1990, is the only public school of this type in Poland. The research goal of the study is to show Hamerski’s path to the creation and development of his unique pedagogy.

Methods and materials. The study uses methods: biographical and source analysis (studies, press mentions posted on the Internet, studies posted on websites, magazine articles, and interviews conducted by the author with Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas). The sources were subjected to content analysis and interpretation, during which the following variables were identified: importance of the childhood and youth biography of Hamerski for the formation of the foundations of Łejery pedagogy; importance of the early pedagogical ex-

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periences of Jerzy for the development of the idea of Łejery pedagogy; and Hamerski's cooperation with Elżbieta Drygas as the basis for creating systemic solutions and developing Łejery pedagogy.

Results and conclusion. Hamerski consistently strived to create and develop child-oriented pedagogy, devoting his entire life to this mission. The Łejery pedagogy is the result of Jerzy's family and pedagogical experiences, and it has systemic solutions because of the cooperation of Hamerski with Drygas. Proof of the effective implementation of the assumptions of Łejery pedagogy are statements by people associated with the school environment and the existence of Łejery over the course of 50 years.

Keywords: Łejery pedagogy, Jerzy Hamerski, Elżbieta Drygas, child education, school

Abstrakt

Cel. W koncepcji pedagogicznej „Łejerów”, stworzonej przez poznańskiego pedagoga Jerzego Hamerskiego (a rozwijającej się od 1975 roku), w centrum zainteresowania znajduje się dziecko. Szkoła Podstawowa nr 83 w Poznaniu, w której od 1990 roku „Łejery” realizują swoją wizję edukacji demokratycznej i edukacji poprzez teatr, jest jedyną tego typu szkołą publiczną w Polsce. Celem badawczym opracowania jest ukazanie drogi Hamerskiego do utworzenia i rozwoju unikatowej w skali Polski pedagogiki „łejerskiej”.

Metody i materiały. W opracowaniu posłużono się metodami: biograficzną oraz analizy źródeł (opracowań, wzmianek prasowych zamieszczonych w Internecie, opracowań zamieszczonych na stronach internetowych, artykułów z czasopism, wywiadów realizowanych przez autorkę z Jerzym Hamerskim i Elżbietą Drygas w roku szkolnym 2023/2024). Źródła poddano analizie treściowej i interpretacji, w toku której wyodrębniono następujące zmienne: znaczenie biografii dziecięcej i młodzieńczej Jerzego Hamerskiego dla kształtowania się podstaw pedagogiki „łejerskiej” – Jerzego wychowanie w rodzinie; znaczenie wczesnych doświadczeń pedagogicznych twórcy pedagogiki „łejerskiej” dla kształtowania się idei pedagogiki „łejerskiej”; znaczenie współpracy Jerzego Hamerskiego z Elżbietą Drygas dla tworzenia systemowych rozwiązań i rozwoju pedagogiki „łejerskiej”.

Wyniki i wnioski. Hamerski bardzo konsekwentnie dążył do stworzenia i rozwoju pedagogiki zorientowanej ku dziecku, poświęcając tej misji całe swoje życie. Pedagogika „łejerska” jest wynikiem doświadczeń rodzinnych i pedagogicznych Jerzego, a fakt, iż doczekała się rozwiązań systemowych wynika z jego harmonijnej współpracy z Elżbietą Drygas. Dowodem skutecznej realizacji założeń pedagogiki „łejerskiej” są nie tylko liczne wypowiedzi osób związanych ze środowiskiem szkoły, lecz także trwanie „Łejerów” przez 50 lat.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika „łejerska”, Jerzy Hamerski, Elżbieta Drygas, edukacja dziecka, szkoła

Introduction

In the pedagogical concept of *Łejery*, created by Jerzy Hamerski, the centre of interest is the Korczak man – the child. In *Łejery* pedagogy, we deal with a unique reception of selected concepts of New Education, and the outstanding figure of the Old Doctor Janusz Korczak comes to the fore. *Łejery* pedagogy is designed for the child, its autonomy and responsibility, and its development. The word *Łejery* is a children's cry expressing wonder at the world and comes from the Poznań dialect. Primary School No. 83, where *Łejery* has been implementing its vision of democratic education and education through theatre since 1990, is the only school of this type in Poland.

Taking into account the dignity of the child and concern for its harmonious development, Hamerski emphasises many times:

I would completely change the philosophy of thinking about school because we in "Łejery" are against the rat race. It would also be good if each school had its face and sought its identity. And here there is a whole symbolic and formal layer. We want every class in Polish schools to have the same conditions, but also be different. We would replace school councils with school republics. Because this is a practical lesson in democracy, and what the shell will absorb when you are young... (Hamerski, 2021, para. 45)¹

At Primary School No. 83 Emilia Waśniowska in Poznań, commonly known as *Łejery*, and established by Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas in 1990, "[...] on one of the walls of the foyer there are photos of all the students – each dressed in a certain outfit: so there are firefighters, policemen, and a washerwoman" (Czekała, 2016, p. 329). It is the only school in Poland with a theatre building adjacent to it, built in 2013. This place resembles a theatre located in school barracks brought from the Netherlands on 13 trucks. Children's teachers are friends, and at school, a specific language is created, borrowed from scouting, for example, a teacher is not a "sir," not a "madam," but a "companion," the teachers' room is a "company room," the canteen is a "dining room," *etc.*

Hamerski received numerous awards for his educational and cultural activities, including the Award of the President of the Republic of Poland for his works for children and youth, "Art to the Young," which was presented to Hamerski in December 2003. He is a cult figure in Poznań and not only there. Educator and artist. A great enthusiast who devoted his entire professional life to education through art. Founder and creator

¹ All quotations in the text come from Polish-language texts and are the author's own translations.

of a children's and youth theatre and a school under the common name Łejery. For several generations, he has been spreading his love for theatre to children and working with the youngest, based on the idea that art makes people better and wiser. He has collaborated with Polish Television, culminating in several excellent and popular programs, thanks to which slogans such as "Turn off the TV, turn it on yourself!" or "Family songs" – the idea of family singing, have gone far beyond the school itself" (Ceremony of presenting the President of the Republic of Poland Award for works for children and youth "Art for the Young," 2003). It should also be clearly emphasised that in June 2024, Jerzy Hamerski joined the International Chapter of the Order of the Smile.

According to the assumptions of Łejery pedagogy, the school is to help parents raise wise and good people—optimistic, bold, tolerant, and full of creative energy and goodwill, in other words – free, conscious citizens.

Jerzy Hamerski, as will be shown in this study, has been associated with theatre from the very beginning; it is, in a sense, the soul of Łejery pedagogy (Sadowska, 2024), because:

All arts meet in the theatre, after all, as Tove Janson writes in *The Summer of the Moomins*, "theatre is the most important thing in the world because there you show people what they could be, what they would like to be, even though they do not have the means to do so. Courage, and what they are." (Drygas & Hamerski, n.d., p. 59)

Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas attribute a special role to the theatre in the process of integral upbringing of a child (Sadowska, 2024).

Research Methodology

The research goal of this study is to show Jerzy Hamerski's path to creating a unique Łejery pedagogy in Poland, known for placing the child's perspective at its centre, recognisable due to education through theatre and democratic education.

The main problem adopted by the author is the question: How were the foundations of Jerzy Hamerski's Łejery pedagogy shaped?

To answer the question indicated above, the biographical method (Szymaniak, 2013) and the method of analysing sources (Skrzyniarz, 2018) were used, both existing and evoked (studies, press mentions posted on the Internet, studies posted on websites related to Łejery, interviews conducted by the author with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas during the school year 2023/2024 on the premises of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań). The sources were subjected to detailed analysis and interpretation, during which the following variables were isolated and described:

the importance of the childhood and youth biography of Jerzy Hamerski for the formation of the foundations of Lejery pedagogy – Jerzy's upbringing in the family;

the importance of the early pedagogical experiences of the creator of Lejery pedagogy for the development of the idea of Lejery pedagogy;

the importance of Jerzy Hamerski's cooperation with Elżbieta Drygas for creating systemic solutions of Lejery pedagogy.

It was assumed that the biographical method and the method of source analysis used in pedagogical research situate this research in a qualitative orientation. According to the author, the use of the indicated methods allows for a theoretical explanation of both concepts, which seems particularly important in the case of this study, development processes. The material was organised during the process of learning and separating the layers of the collected material, *i.e.*, the layer of objective circumstances, the layer of subjective experiences, layers of memories, language and its properties, and commentative reflections (attempts to make sense).

The study retains many original quotations from the sources indicated above to highlight the specificity of the culture of Lejery pedagogy and to show a specific linguistic image of the described construct.

Fragments of the childhood biography and upbringing in Jerzy Hamerski's family (against the background of the political and social situation in Poland) as the foundation of Lejery pedagogy.

Hamerski is an outstanding active social activist and educator who has consistently strived to implement a unique vision of child-oriented education, devoting his entire life to this mission. This teacher had to grow up in difficult times, as he was born on January 14, 1944, at the end of World War II. Jerzy's biography covers the turbulent period of the end of the war, his childhood and adolescence in the times of totalitarianism, repression, economic crises of the country, enslavement, and separation from the world, which at that time was developing unrestrained democracy. Jerzy Hamerski spent his childhood in the times "[...] when the Legislative Sejm, elected in January 1947 in elections rigged by the communists, adopted a constitution on July 22, 1952, introducing a new name for the state: the People's Republic of Poland" (Zawistowski, 2012, p. 24). Hamerski, while developing the sources of ideas for creating the concept of Lejery pedagogy, unique in Poland, experienced all the pro-Russian politics typical of the people's policy that existed in Poland in the years 1944–1989.

Although as a child he attended a school with a strongly political educational program, he also served in the church that was built across the street from the school. He also built personal experiences with other children by playing, often being the leader and initiator of games in the yard, including theatre games. Jerzy Hamerski points out that his "[...] adult entry into the world of children began in the backyard of Nowa Sól," although "[...] it started playing in his soul already in kindergarten" (Hamerski, 2020c,

para. 1). Jerzy states that he was “[...] one of a small group of children who eagerly participated in public presentations of children’s poems and songs” (Hamerski, 2020c, para. 1). In primary school, Hamerski, dressed in a white shirt and red scarf of a Stalinist scout, served as the so-called *full-time actor* who “[...] bowed to the revolution with his hat to the ground, in Polish” (Hamerski, 2020c, para. 1). As he notes: “on Sundays (under the strong influence of my parents) I put on a white surplice and a red altar boy’s cape to zealously serve mass. A kind of schizophrenia – such were the times” (Hamerski, 2020c, para. 1).

Jerzy Hamerski says that he was born “in a bomb crater” because this was the term applied to children born during the war. He writes about his ancestors, as befits him, in a slightly joking tone, describing the history of two households:

Once upon a time, before World War II, there were two houses in two different corners of Poland. The first was a forester’s lodge called *Dębina*, picturesquely situated among the forests near Września in Greater Poland. The forester Bronisław Hamerski lived there with his wife Magdalena and seven children. There was a “black sheep” in this family flock, Broniś, who did not want to adapt to the family rules. Whenever his heart felt good, he would run away from home with the Gypsies for days, and sometimes even nights. He decided to become a circus artist, preferably a clown (because he had an outstanding sense of humour). In the barn, under the ceiling, he tinkered with gymnastic equipment. The enraged father Bronisław, broke pieces of the trapeze on Broniś and declared: “If you don’t want to be a forester, you will be a shoemaker or a hairdresser – choose.” Broniś decided to take up hairdressing, probably out of the need to secure viewers. (Hamerski, 2020c, para. 4)

The second house of the family history of Hamerski’s ancestors was covered with a straw roof and stood in the village of Zawada on the Wolburka River, near Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The house was inhabited by a family of farmers, Antoni and Małgorzata Rybak, and their five children. Among them, “Krysia, a cheerful individualist, a stubborn Capricorn,” becomes particularly important for Jerzy’s story. She was the leader among her siblings, constantly inventing new games. This Krysia “[...] didn’t like farm work, she was drawn to the city. Every morning, she willingly walked across the bridge on Wolburka, among the Masovian willows, to the school in Tomaszów, where she studied with flying colours” (Hamerski, 2020a, para. 4).

In the period described above by the founder of Łejery, the world faced the cruelty of World War II. When the Germans attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, senior private Bronisław Hamerski was conscripted into the Poznań Army, which was moving towards Warsaw. “On the Bzura River, near Sochaczew, takes part in the famous battle against the overwhelming forces of the Nazi invader” (Hamerski,

2020, para. 3). Bronisław Hamerski, along with many thousands of Polish soldiers of the September Campaign

[...] was driven to a prisoner of war camp on the territory of the Third Reich and then forced to work as slaves on a farm for a German Bauer. At that time, the Germans took seventeen-year-old Krystyna Rybak from her home village to forced labour in a thread factory in Hersfeld, a beautiful town in Hesse. (Hamerski, 2020a, para. 3)

Krystyna and Bronisław met and fell in love in Hesse. The story of their life, which Hamerski knows from the stories of Krystyna and Bronisław — his parents — is an interlocutor defining the decorative life of landscapes, which, however, was burdened with the stigma of war, nightmare, constant consequences, and a place of humiliation. Radios were not allowed under penalty of death, and food rations were not sufficient for consumption.

Jurek concludes his story about roots in this way: "It is in the mother's womb that the embryo is created, my slowly pulsating life, which had to be controlled by the Germans for many months because Polish women were subordinated to maternity rights."²

However, the founder of *Lejery* argues that although he was born during the war, his family managed to survive, among other things, because "[...] there were many honest and good people among the Germans who helped mom and dad." Jerzy also recalls that during 1944, the "[...] nightmare that was sweeping across Europe slowly began to end. And happy Easter, 1945 came. The hated swastikas fell from the flagpoles, white flags were hoisted at the town hall, and Americans entered Hersfeld, greeted with ovations by Poles."³

Together with his parents, young Jurek lived in a former German barracks in the town of Wetzlar. In the spring of 1946, Jurek's sister, Lila, was born. Hamerski describes his sister's baptism as follows:

In a huge barrack, Poles set up a makeshift church, where weddings and baptisms of couples married in Germany, including Krystyna and Bronisław Hamerski and their children Jerzyk and Lila, took place. Then the parents had to make the most difficult decision in their lives: go to the United States or return to Poland. Dad had the biggest problem. His friends advised him against returning to the country: "This is not the Poland you fought for, Bronek. Everything there is now under Soviet rule."

² Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 20, 2023.

³ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 20, 2023.

As we learn from Jurek's family history, his father's nostalgia and patriotism took over, and he was ordered to return to Poland. The Americans made transport – a long freight train, perfectly adapted to travel with entire families. After many days, we reached the Recovered Grounds. When Jerzy was three years old, the Hamerski family settled in Nowa Sól (Neu Salz). The Hamerski family lived in a former German block on a street renamed from Hitlerstrasse to Kościuszki Street. The interlocutor says about this period:

This is my new mysterious world, where there was a war recently. This was evidenced by German inscriptions and characteristic helmets scattered everywhere, blind, burnt-out windows in still empty apartments, ruins of houses among which people moved – war invalids without arms, without legs, blind. In the kitchen, where a German family lived not long ago, there was a white tiled stove with large baking trays and fireplaces. Outside the bedroom window, two towering poplars were reaching the sky. From the stool placed next to it in the dining room, I looked with curiosity at the yard where boys older than me were playing in the wreck of a Volkswagen military car abandoned by the war. A scene like one from Fellini's "Amarcord." For these kids in pre-war, patched clothes, often supplemented with military uniforms, this car drove, triggered the imagination, and transported them to happy worlds that the war had taken away from them⁴.

Despite the post-war scenery, "human bustle" quickly began in Nowa Sól, and the settler community made every effort to make everyday life completely new and somehow recover after the war. This needs shops, factories, various institutions, craft workshops and a hairdresser, whose founder was Jerzy's father – Bronisław. Jerzy Hamerski remembers a hairdressing salon as a magical place where he and his father spent hours surrounded by the smell of perfumes, colognes, different-smelling soaps, the clicking of hair clippers and the whistling of razors sharpened on large belts. The friend describes that it was a happy place because this fun was created by his dad:

I remember that curious children's noses were stuck to the large shop window, frightened away by their father with a broom, and then they squealed, the noses disappeared, only to return a moment later to repeat the fun⁵.

At the same time, Jerzy recalls that this joy was sometimes interrupted – "[...] it disappeared, the conversations stopped — there was a silence that was incomprehensible to me. The time of Stalinism was beginning."

⁴ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on April 23, 2024.

⁵ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on April 23, 2024.

In the fall of 1949, Jurek became a preschooler. In the story described by him, we read:

Every morning, we gathered in front of a huge portrait of a man with a bushy moustache and a pipe, dressed in a white military uniform. We thanked him for the fresh rolls for breakfast and other blessings. It was Generalissimo Joseph Stalin, our great Soviet friend. His real name was Soso Dzhugashvili, and he came from Georgia. Every day, you read to us passages of a book titled "Soso."⁶

As we conclude from Jerzy Hamerski's story, the world of a child during Stalinism was very different from the perception of reality by adults:

One afternoon, while we were having fun with little Frank, our newly born brother, my dad came home. He was different, nervous and didn't joke like usual. From his coat, he took out Melchior Wańkowicz's book *Monte Cassino*, wrapped in newspaper. Late in the evening, through the open door to the kitchen, I saw my parents leaning over the table, quietly humming "Red Poppies at Monte Cassino." In the morning, while walking to kindergarten with my dad, I told him with enthusiasm about the brave Soso. My dad looked at me with horror and helplessness.

As a graduate of the Stalinist kindergarten, Jerzy became a student at the Primary School named after Zoya Kosmodemiańska, a Soviet heroine promoted by the propaganda of the communist system as an archetype of a woman-activist and martyr sacrificing her life in the name of the prevailing ideology (Florentina-Dobre, 2023; Krylova, 2010).

The school attended by young Jerzy also organised a scouting group typical of the Stalinist period, "[...] which was almost a faithful copy of the Soviet pioneers."⁷

From Hamerski's account, we learn that the uniforms resembled those of the pioneers – the scouts were dressed in white shirts and red scarves (Hamerski, 2020a). Each class was divided into two teams. Jerzy Hamerski recalls that the songs were sung in Polish, but many of them belonged to the Soviet repertoire and were translated from Russian. Young scouts met with Soviet pioneers – children of soldiers stationed near Nowa Sól (Szprotawa, Legnica). Despite Jerzy's awareness that the times in which he grew up had little to do with political and social normality, he argues that for him this period was devoid of so-called *traumatic experiences* (Hamerski, 2020a).

⁶ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on April 23, 2024.

⁷ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on April 29, 2024.

The scouting and pioneering methods were close to the “goat” age, and artistic forms (singing, bonfires, or playing instruments) are my element. It was different from my parents, who were returning to a different Poland from the war nightmare in Germany. I remember their deep anxiety, constant fear and mysterious evening conversations in the kitchen that I did not understand. There were also often sharp tensions between me and, especially, my father⁸.

Jerzy also argues that the merit of his avoidance of indoctrination was the warmth of the home that Krystyna and Bronisław created for their children:

My dear, wise parents, aware of the indoctrination I was subjected to at school, created a refuge for us in a home where, to paraphrase Młynarski, we could sing: “There’s no place like mom’s, there’s no place like dad’s, a warm stove, quiet corner.”

And in fact, in the Hamerski family’s house, there were three of these stoves, because the above-mentioned white one is in the kitchen, and two are made of brown tiles, reaching to the ceilings, in the dining room and the bedroom. Jurek writes with nostalgia that the house was:

[...] warm and cheerful. Lila had her own girls’ world of dolls, and I mostly lived at the kitchen table, wandering around different worlds in an imaginary car. Together, we played with “carousels” made of pot lids that were set in motion like tops. In the afternoon, Dad came back from work, and he was even happier. And in the evenings, before lying on the big family bed, my mother would warm large pillows and duvets for us by the stove. Then it was a run to a warm blanket and the obligatory bedtime story or stories from dad and mom about their families around Września and Tomaszów⁹.

Jerzy also recalls that in the morning he liked to “[...] peer out of the windows at the city in the distance,” noticing through the kitchen window “[...] a cylindrical brick tower with a clock, topped with a metal crown, soaring up over the roofs”¹⁰. This tower was owned by a church dedicated to St. Anthony – during Hamerski’s childhood, he was transformed from an Evangelical church to a Catholic one.

From the bedroom window, the young Friend admired “[...] the chimney of the Guschwitz thread factory, supposedly one of the largest in Europe, higher than the poplars,” and through the windows in the dining room, “[...] you could see the ruins

⁸ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on April 23, 2024.

⁹ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 12, 2024.

¹⁰ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 16, 2023.

of some factory and behind them the railway tracks, on which from time to time trains were running.”

Referring to the memories of those times, the founder of Łejery also recalls that at home there was a talking and playing box hanging on the wall, which my parents ironically called “kolkhoznik.” On the side, it had a knob for turning off and adjusting the volume. It was the first radio in my life. Most often, however, it was silent; my parents didn’t want to listen to it, and I didn’t understand why.

Jerzy also describes that he and his family tended a former German garden, which “[...] day by day” turned into a “multicoloured, fragrant bouquet.” The friend also recalls that while wandering the streets of the city, he discovered a beautiful idea of the Germans: flower trees bloomed on many streets in Nowa Sól, in spring, summer, and autumn (Hamerski & Drygas, 2023–2024). In May, “I was walking with my mother along Dzerzhinsky Street under a canopy of white wild cherry blossoms. At the same time, *Zjednoczenia* Street was blooming with many species of lilacs – we would go there in the evenings as a family to enjoy their scents”¹¹.

The Importance of Jerzy Hamerski’s Early Experiences for the Development of the Idea of Łejery Pedagogy

The beginnings of Jerzy Hamerski’s path to creating the foundations of Łejery pedagogy are related to his idea for the “Children’s Theatre,” about which the adult Hamerski says:

The formula of my community theatre was born from childhood experiences. A seemingly poor childhood, without a TV or computer, or even a bicycle. These inventions had to be replaced with something so we could move to other areas, other lands, to escape from the still-fresh wounds of the cruel war. A car wreck abandoned by the Germans, rusty bicycle rims, sticks, boards, strings, rags, *etc.* These are props that, thanks to children’s imagination, became an inspiration for most imaginative games. In those moments, the animated objects began to begin a great adventure. When pushed with a stick or a bicycle wheel rim, activated by a specially bent wire, it became a racing motorcycle¹².

Jerzy Hamerski describes that Nowa Sól was like his first set:

¹¹ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 12, 2024.

¹² Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 16, 2023.

Nowa Sól, fortunately, was not badly damaged by the war. Most of the architectural wonders, including many palaces and houses in the Art Nouveau style, remained intact. For as long as I can remember, my wanderings around the town had something magical about them, something I didn't understand at the time. (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 3)

According to Jerzy Hamerski, he felt as if the houses, yards, staircases, basements, and attics in which he grew up became the setting for the stories he created, and various objects became props (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 3).

Describing his way to the theatre, Jurek Hamerski recalls that on one of the streets, there were a dozen or so low tenement houses attached, housing various shops and craft workshops. "Maybe a bit similar to the cinnamon ones in Drohobych by Bruno Schulz... Anyway, in one of them, we bought long, brown tubes of cinnamon, which I liked very much."

One of the first inspirations for the creation of a group children's theatre for Hamerski was a Gypsy camp that arrived not far from Jerzy's family home and set up camp near a forest by a river. In Jerzy's story, we read that he was extremely "attracted" to this place, "[...] just like my dad, who, as a child, spent days and nights with the Gypsies on the Wrześnica River" (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 4). Jurek writes that he was impatiently waiting for the Gypsies "[...] just like the inhabitants of the Colombian village of Mocando were waiting in "One Hundred Years of Solitude." The people were fascinating. I was captivated by their fantasy, sense of freedom and fellowship with nature, and the music, singing, and dancing were especially delightful. I was most enchanted by the czardas, at first slow, wide, dreamy... then fast, crazy" (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 4). Hamerski recalls that at home, he was a kind of entertainer for his younger siblings. He made his dreams of being a priest (which involved young Jurek participating in the liturgical service of the altar) come true by making a home liturgical theatre. Hamerski "heralded" his younger siblings "[...] to build an altar from a dressing table, balusters from an ironing board, a church banner from a broom and a towel," and he, playing the role of a priest, celebrated mass, as it was supposed to be done before the Second Vatican Council, in the Latin language. The friend also recalls that his sister and brother served as altar boys, "[...] jingling keys instead of bells." Jerzy's innate sense of observation and sensitivity to other people allowed him to note that other children liked the games he proposed in the yard. Jerzy recalls that the first play he wanted to perform in the backyard theatre was "Timur and his team" by Arkady Gaidar. Jerzy independently prepared the adaptation of the text, designed the set and selected the cast. He notes: "I cast myself, of course, as Timur, and Stefunia, whom I had a crush on, as Zoya. The show ended up being a flop due to a lack of experience..."¹³

¹³ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 16, 2023.

Therefore, it seems that despite the difficult times, young Jerzy Hamerski did not lack the enthusiasm to take advantage of every opportunity to develop, to create, to create a reality different from the one that adult Poles were aware of in the times of the grey and drab propaganda of the Polish People's Republic. Colours, activities, a range of countless initiatives and imagination were the initial capital of the future educator. The extraordinary gift of winning over other people, the gift of establishing cooperation with them, motivating them to take up challenges – all this meant that Jerzy was never alone in his pursuits. And determination... perhaps it was the times that made Hamerski never give up his pedagogical ideas for the future and instilled them in friendly people so strongly that he pursued further goals with them.

As Jurek recalls, he often heard a dangerous prophecy from teachers: "If only you taught other people's children," because teachers often ran out of patience with an unruly student with a sensitive character and ideas for innovations in the course of lessons.

The school that Jerzy attended also housed a Pedagogical Secondary School. Jurek, therefore, admits:

To avoid fulfilling the prophecy, and this time to fulfil the dreams of my father, who grew up in a forester's lodge, I went to study at a forestry technical school. After just two years, it turned out that all the learning had gone to waste because my soul felt completely different. I was drawn to people, to music, to singing¹⁴.

After only two years of forestry education, "[...] the teachers' prophecy comes true" and Jerzy begins his education at the pedagogical high school in Nowa Sól (Hamerski, 2020b, para 3). He describes the beginnings of his teaching path as not easy because initially, the teachers were not favourable to him – they remembered the unconventional behaviour that he showed in primary school and considered it irritating. Hamerski writes that: "The then principal of the High School, Edward Jarmoliński, said to my future teacher, Professor Anna Kulińska: "Take it but at your own risk." The professor took a risk and I started preparing to teach other people's children" (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 4). It seems that this period gave Hamerski special artistic competencies, as he writes:

I entered an extraordinary world, full of music, singing, youthful and children's chatter. I began to create and develop my artistic, intellectual, and leadership predispositions. The duty of every student was, among others, to play a selected instrument—the most common choices were mandolin or violin. I was improving my previous ability to play the accordion. (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 3)

¹⁴ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 16, 2023.

Jerzy remembers his teacher—Professor Maria Kędzierzawska—“[...] a charismatic teacher of music and singing,” thanks to whom “artistic life took place in high school” (Hamerski, 2020b, para. 9).

In the high school in Nowy Sól, there were numerous class groups and all-school choirs, orchestras, duets, trios, quartets and vocal and musical quintets. There was also a school theatre. About vocational education, Hamerski writes that his combination of leadership and artistic talents was useful in this area, because the lesson has its drama, and the teacher is the director of the show. Jerzy describes that the first lesson he taught will remain unforgettable for him:

Despite the exemplary preparation, the stage fright was enormous, because apart from the children, the reviewers, *i.e.*, teachers and colleagues, sat in a circle at the back of the class. The beginning was quite unfortunate because when I was checking the attendance list, I saw an ugly-sounding name. I froze. For a few seconds that seemed to last forever, I was helpless. The teacher saved me from trouble, and the lesson later went smoothly, joyfully and intelligently¹⁵.

However, in his reflections, Jurek points out that after 1956, the place for his artistic displays was the real, reactivated Scouting movement, or rather evening bonfires or fireplaces, where I acted as a “star,” presenting skits, monologues and singing to the accompaniment accordion. He also says:

So my future was bright – I decided to become a teacher. That’s why I went to a pedagogical high school. There, due to some artistic successes, I began to hesitate: to become an artist or a teacher? I decided I would be both, but among children, in scouting, at school, and on stage. And it is so beautiful and creative to this day¹⁶.

The beginnings of the theatrical initiatives of the now-adult Jerzy are related to the educational history of Przyborów, where scout bonfires and fireplaces with songs, skits, monologues, and recitations proposed by Hamerski attracted an increasingly large audience of children and adults, transforming the school into a rural cultural centre, a theatre. In May, attendance began to drop, and the theatre was empty. It turned out that it was time for spring farm work and grazing cows. Because village children participated in farm work, Jerzy decided that “[...] if he can’t go up to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go up” and suggested to the busy people in the field for children “[...] the first happening in their lives entitled: ‘Miss krowa Przyborowa’”:

¹⁵ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 16, 2023.

¹⁶ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

With several children, a harmonica, a banner and a huge clover wreath, we set off along a dirt road from pasture to pasture. The cleanest and nicest cow devoured the clover wreath, and the people were very happy. In his speech, the village head admitted that as far as he can remember, he has never seen such well-groomed and graceful cows¹⁷.

Hamerski, in the 1960s, joined the Makusyns, whose founder and scoutmaster was Zbigniew Czarnuch, whom Jurek always refers to as a master.

The first scout team was established by Czarnuch (1972) on February 24, 1957 (Hufiec Zielona Góra ZHP im. Pionierów Ziemi Lubuskiej, 2020). For the first two years, it was a boys' cycling team. The team was growing at an alarming rate – "[...] there was no need to create encouraging posts on social media – the children from Zielona Góra simply wanted to learn through play and gain new experience. Scouting was the most accessible, organised form of entertainment" (Hufiec Zielona Góra ZHP im. Pionierów Ziemi Lubuskiej, 2020, para. 2). Because the team was very popular among young people,

[...] after some time, girls also started to join the team. The Macusins quickly became so numerous that a tribe was created. Unfortunately, in 1968, due to the political system that prevailed in the 1960s, Zbigniew Czarnuch had to leave Zielona Góra for Poznań, and the strain ended up in the hands of someone else. (Hufiec Zielona Góra ZHP im. Pionierów Ziemi Lubuskiej, 2020, para. 3)

Jadwiga Korcz-Dziadosz (2020) points out that Zbigniew Czarnuch was employed in 1956 as the manager of the Scout Home in Zielona Góra. Makusyny on bicycles explored the near and far surroundings, learning history, discovering and getting to know their small and large homeland, like themselves through tourism (Czarnuch, 1972). Czarnuch knew perfectly well that setting tasks and developing goals together, and then working to achieve this universally accepted goal, is a simple way to create an extraordinary positive bond in the group (Idzikowski, 2013). Scouting, in which Łejer pedagogical ideas were born, was not a paramilitary dimension but was an authentic touring and artistic movement (Flügel, 2008). In Makusyny, Jerzy's passion for theatre and pedagogy continued to develop. Makusyny did not stop at camps, special events and tournaments; they also staged plays and shows (Hudon, 1968), among others: *Three Nights of Frights or the Revenge of the Raubrycer* or *The Opera about Christopher Columbus*. There was also a show by Jerzy Litwiniuk *Cannibals*, in which the *Cudaki*, as an African tribe, devoured a certain pedagogical body and the play summed up

¹⁷ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

the moral: “We are like snuff in the corner / Ni be, ni me, ni be, ni me¹⁸/ Don’t devour teachers, because it ends very badly.”¹⁹

In his pedagogical work, Jerzy Hamerski refers to the Makusyns as well as to Professor Heliodor Muszyński:

I think that the secret of such a long existence of the group lies in the educational idea established at the beginning and the methods and forms of work adapted to it, and, above all, in the fantastic teachers and artists whom I managed to gather around me. I was also lucky to have masters: Heliodor Muszyński and scoutmaster Zbigniew Czarnuch, the creator of the Zielona Góra Makusyns, with whom I apprenticed as an apprentice.

Jerzy says that throughout his life, while constructing and perfecting the concept of Łejery pedagogy, he was constantly looking for new, own paths that marked an activity of children (Hamerski, 1981, 1982). For Hamerski,

[...] it was important to break stereotypes rooted both in us, adults (*homo sovieticus*), and in anachronistic teaching and upbringing methods. In the empowerment of children and parents. In inspiring teachers, parents and children to take up common, great challenges: building your school and theatre.

For the founder of Łejery, scouting was something that allowed him to do crazy, unconventional things with people who wanted to be with him:

The children shone, became more beautiful, learned courage, learned to be friends with each other. Why scouting? In my childhood, it satisfied my need to belong to a peer group, leading the group and allowing me to develop artistic talents. When I became a teacher, the scout method, it turned out, was a great educational tool, providing interesting and effective forms of working with children²⁰.

The friend talks about his first visits to Łejery as follows:

I started working as a teacher on September 1, 1965, in the village of Przyborów near Nowa Sól. I started it with many experiences from childhood, school, church, scouting,

¹⁸ This is a childish play on words included by Hamerski and Drygas in their statement, which cannot be translated.

¹⁹ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

²⁰ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on December 20, 2023.

Pedagogical Secondary School and Teacher Training College. It turned out that all these places have in common two talents that God has given me: leadership qualities and artistic abilities.

In my childhood and youth, my pedagogical activities were intuitive. I became more aware of my actions over my adult years. I was lucky to have master teachers. A few kilometres from Przyborów, in the ruins of the castle in Siedlisko, the legendary Makusyny, *i.e.*, Sons of Makuszyński, a scout tribe led by ScoutMASTER Zbigniew Czarnuch, nested. Very quickly our paths crossed, and I became his apprentice. In 1969, I was invited to work in the then-famous Poznań pedagogical experiment by Prof. Heliodor Muszyński. And that's how my great Poznań adventure began, which lasted for over fifty years!

Jerzy Hamerski, about the "Open" concept, says that they were:

New ideas, hints, thoughts. He opened hearts and minds, and developed tolerance, empathy and skills. Our circle was always broken because it was a symbolic place for a new person. Children are open, but some people are very closed, because of school and family. In the 1970s, there were certainly no such addictions among children, no such mental problems. There were simple rules and simple directions: school-home-church-obedience. Obedience to teachers, parents, elders, in general – you have to obey. Today, this lack of values, this lack of hierarchy, this lack of a corset is harmful. Young generations are confused about directions. We need to distinguish the harmful corset of traditional schools from the good corset of manners, rules, norms, and hierarchy of authorities. Yes, I was the one who opened people up to people. Not by accident, not based on improvisation. It was an idea discussed with Muszyński, with Kuroń, with Czarnuch. These were model people for me²¹.

Open was established as a branch of the scout team at Primary School No. 76 on Sierakowska Street in Poznań (Hamerski, 1981). It was opened for unusual initiatives, including thanks to experiments carried out by Haliodor Muszyński (Kujawiński, 2010). The strain was created when Edward Gierek introduced free Saturdays (Czekąła, 2016) and less than a year after the Open was established, at the school in Grunwald, children presented adult educators with doctorates "Humoris Causa" (Czekąła, 2016). The swearing-in of this Scout Artistic Team took place in November 1975. Hamerski did not fit into scouting and wore the scout hat "inappropriately." A friend remembers:

²¹ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

I was looking for my paths and probably wouldn't have found myself in this movement if it wasn't for the special teams formula. We fit in that, but our scouts were not so "at attention." Of course, with respect for the symbols, but already in the pledge, I modified the words "to be faithful to the cause of socialism" and added "good socialism" at the beginning, and then I removed this passage altogether. Besides, my pupils claim that thanks to me, they did not feel socialism. We had our base—a scout group—we played, sang, made theatre²².

Hamerski's activities of the scout troop on the premises of the above-mentioned school were conducted by Jerzy Hamerski (1981) together with Barbara Śreniowska, who came to Poznań from Łódź. The friend notes that the activities of Open at Primary School No. 76 spanned a few good years, but over time—as he reports—the school "[...] began to bother us a bit, and we got a little carried away there too." Interlocutor says:

I was at school, but it was always different. Working with chalk on a blackboard was not for me. I preferred creating teams and running extracurricular activities. Without narrow frames, a system of classrooms and corridors and endless discussions over a cigarette in the staff room²³.

In the 1970s, Hamerski started working at the Youth Research Institute of the previously mentioned Professor Heliodor Muszyński (cf. Kowolik, 2007; Muszyński, 1972; Szalkiewicz, 2016) and from the Open, three groups were distinguished: girls *Włazkotki*, boys *Cyrkusy* and co-educational *Golden Handymen*.

The head of the first unit was Magdalena "Mycha" Myszkiewicz, and Cyrkus was commanded by Piotr Gąsowski. Over time, the journalist group *Positive Wścibusy* emerged from the Golden Handymen group.

Jerzy Hamerski recalls that in 1978, together with Open, he went to the Scout Festival of School Youth Culture in Kielce with the play *Romeo and Juliet*. As he points out:

Interestingly, we were rejected like a cabaret group—Mieczysław Czechowicz himself did not recognise us—but we were accepted to compete in a theatre group—here Tomasz Szymański helped. The cabaret artists felt proud when we won the Gold. It turned out that Jurek's theatre initiatives began to be very successful very quickly. It is worth mentioning that in 1983, the story of Romeo and Juliet staged by Łejery caused Bulgarian journalist, Ivan Karik, to fall from his chair with laughter, even though [...] he did not understand a single word. (Czekala, 2016, p. 318)

²² Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

²³ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

Jerzy Hamerski says about the beginnings of cooperation with Professor Heliodor Muszyński:

Thrown into deep water, I had to quickly learn to swim so as not to drown in these new conditions. It was difficult, especially since I was given the task of organising an exemplary scouting group in a vibrant experimental school. We focused on community scouting, locating it in a nearby housing estate, where the school's students live. Thus, scouting became a bridge connecting school matters with environmental issues. I took the program ideas for the emerging troops and teams from an old book, "Timur and his team," enriched with the experiences of Przyborów and Makusyn, which was the Grand Prix of the Kielce festival. (Czekala, 2016, p. 318)

As Jerzy recalls:

Timur workers, in the spring, set out to reconnoitre the yards. As part of the *Piaskownica* campaign, they identified children's play areas, their technical condition and safety level to prepare areas for scout activities together with the estate administration. A month later, *Donald's Circus* and the *Filipki* theatre appeared on the backyard stages – scout artistic troupes modelled on the Makusyn groups. The *Harcerska Rewia Podwórkowa*, created a year later, was my idea of the Children's community theatre, which, under the name ŁEJERY, exists until now in various places and repertoire varieties.

In the early 1980s, Jerzy Hamerski resigned from Open and moved from school to the Rondo Club of the Grunwald Housing Cooperative. There he only worked with the Łejery. In 1985, Elżbieta Drygas joined the band with whom Jerzy has collaborated until now.

Hamerski believes that an important year for the development of his concept in the 1980s was 1983. At that time, a spectacle from that period, *i.e.*, *Romeo and Juliet*, which is still staged by Łejery,

[...] was seen in Rondo by a Bulgarian journalist and, not understanding a single word, fell from his chair laughing. Thanks to this, we went to the World Festival of Satire and Humor in Gavrov, Bulgaria, as the first children in the history of this festival, to the Soviet Union, Crimea, to a famous pioneer camp. We spent beautiful moments there for a month, in terrible decorations. The children did not feel the historical and political conditions, and let us remember that martial law was in force.

What also seems important is that in the 1980s, Łejery was included in the nationwide television program *Magazyn Harcerzy Krąg* [Scout Circle] (Hamerski &

Drygas, 2023–2024). It was broadcast once a week, and once a month in a theatrical version. And we, together with Zbigniew Czarnuch and Witnica, the city where he had been conducting his activities since 1982, prepared an artistic program for *Krąg*. It was then, as Jerzy Hamerski recalls, that Wanda Chotomska wrote the anthem: “[...] then our horse was created,” a song describing the concept of the work of Łejery through the metaphor of an artistic, free and nice green Pegasus, which has become a permanent part of the band’s history. This horse does not submit to regimes, because “[...] he does not stand by the handler. [...] he says about himself that he does not like the bit very much.” Jerzy Hamerski explains that the rebellious horse:

[...] was born in 1983. I mean, it was with us from the very beginning as an idea; it just didn’t take its proper form. In 1983, the children’s editorial office of TVP offered me a cyclical program as part of *Harcerski Krąg*. We were supposed to perform once a month. I came up with the idea of showing scout art teams every month. Art teams! This is what I think is most valuable in scouting. Once a month, two teams would meet in Poznań or tiny Witnica. This program would provide tasks for other performing arts teams across the country to complete. We were looking for a program song for this series. I asked Wanda Chotomska for such a song, but it had to be about a nice horse. Pegasus was to become a symbol of such winging all artistic teams in Poland. [...] Wanda Chotomska wrote the song “Nasz konik” [Our Little Horse]. Teresa Niewiarowska composed the music, and its graphic design was provided by an outstanding artist, Zbigniew Pilarczyk, professor and vice-rector of Adam Mickiewicz University. A friend of the Łejer family. And then Jaruzelski’s men put him in custody, so “Nasz Konik” became a colonel and a veteran of Martial Law.

Since establishing cooperation with *Krąg*, Łejery has gained a leading position in shaping culture in scouting (Kamińska, 2015). Jurek, in the mid-1980s, was appointed program commander of the Central School of Scout Instructors in Załęcze Wielkie for over two years (Kamińska, 2015).

Łejery was taken over by Elżbieta Drygas in 1986. Next, we went to the Youth Cultural Centre No. 2 behind the Citadel. We were no longer scouts, but theatre Łejery. After 2 years, we came up with the idea of opening a school. The preparations took all of 1989. The first grade in 1990 was kindergarten. We agreed with the children’s parents that we would give up. The wonderful film *Children Too Have a Voice* comes from this period. 18 children came to school because that was all that could be admitted at MDK (youth cultural centre)²⁴.

²⁴ Interview with Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas on November 18, 2023.

Cooperation of Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas in the Process of Creating System Solutions for Łejery Pedagogy

In the justification for the resolution to award Jerzy Hamerski the title of "Merit for the City of Poznań," we read about his character traits:

"The people he works with describe him as a wonderfully insistent person who cannot refuse anything, even in risky situations, because he is such a little man with a big heart" (publicist, director, screenwriter, local government official Juliusz Kubel). "His friends call him a madman and a madman. But only such people can do impossible actions for others" – (actor Witold Dębicki). Perhaps the most apt description of Jerzy Hamerski's unique and creative character was the co-founder of Łejery, Elżbieta Drygas, who said that "with Jurek you cannot dream with impunity. Once I said to him: "But it would be nice to have our school that children would like to go to."²⁵

Elżbieta Drygas is the co-founder of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań. Emilia Waśniowska known as Łejery. As written about Elżbieta in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, on September 29, 2015, she devoted her life to children and theatre (Nowicka, 2015).

Jerzy Hamerski recalls he met Ela Drygas for the first time at the Animation Theatre, during the provincial school stage review in 1985.

She was with her 10-year-old daughter, Małgosia. Ela then won the youth stage with her band *Układ* (deal, agreement), and I won the children's stage with Łejery. Elżbieta asked for Małgosia to be admitted to Łejery. As it turned out, a few months later, her mother followed her daughter to Łejery and that is how the Drygas and Hamerski theatre tandem was created, combining two theatres called "Deal with the Lajers." This was an important moment in the history of Łejery, because Ela brought experience in working with youth theatre as a dowry, which allowed her to remain in the group of Łejery growing up from her childhood. (Hamerski, 2020d, para. 8)

Since then, Elżbieta and Jerzy have created an extraordinary teaching tandem. As Jerzy points out, this

[...] Łejery Agreement enriched us with very important experience: during this cooperation, we found out that we complement each other very much and that we

²⁵ City Council of Poznań. (n.d.). Justification for the draft resolution of the City Council on awarding the title of "Meritorious for the City of Poznań" to Mr Jerzy Hamerski. Private archival materials of Jerzy Hamerski

have different skills and competencies. What I was missing, Ela had and vice versa. Ela, with a more rigorous mind, as an educator, loves teaching, especially new challenges and educational innovations. He also has an extraordinary ability to focus on an individual child and masterfully solves the most difficult parenting problems. Lacking leadership qualities, she did not aspire to managerial roles, but was a “distracted hippie” who valued her independence and freedom greatly. (Hamerski, 2020d, para. 10)

Jerzy Hamerski says about himself a leader-organizer, an animator of a crowd, a large number of children, so a specialist in teamwork, not very patient in didactic repetition, more of an improviser and creator of new situations. Attached to the formula of “collective theatre,” which he once observed in Makusyns’ Cudaki and creatively developed (Hamerski, 2020d), thinking that cooperation with Elżbieta Drygas was not easy for both of them, because: “You know, a tandem has only one handlebar!” (Hamerski, 2020d, para. 10).

In 1988, Hamerski and Drygas moved into the Youth Cultural Centre at the Citadel. Teatr Łejery, which had been operating for 13 years with great success, both educationally and artistically, was a close-knit group of friends, had a rich tradition behind it, and considerable artistic achievements, already known in Poland and some countries that were then so-called *iron curtain*. The group was an extracurricular activity, so membership was voluntary then. It gathered children and later young people from all over the city.

Due to the study of children’s experiences, Elżbieta Drygas proposed to create a school where children and young people would feel good and be able to fulfil themselves in harmony with themselves. Ela recalls:

[...] establishing a school meant implementing many stages. At that time (in 1989), new regulations on community schools were introduced. Many such schools were being built, and we would run around and look at them and check what was happening there. Most of these schools no longer exist; they operated only for two or three years. In our case, the good thing was that at the beginning we didn’t have to build any school, we were just in the Community Centre, which was empty in the morning. Therefore, we first proposed the so-called *theatre kindergarten*, for which we will use one of the rooms of the Cultural Centre. Besides, it was easier to obtain consent for such a zero. It was precisely the case that due to the political changes, the lady in the office knew that the staff of the Board of Trustees would also change. So, when I came to her about obtaining permission to open a kindergarten theatre, she said: “If you want, I’ll sign it, because I don’t work here anymore.” (Hamerski, 2020d, para. 15–16)

Jerzy Hamerski’s account of his colleague’s initiative is as follows:

Ela has been saying for years that it's dangerous to dream when Jurek is around. One day she said: "Jurek, maybe we should start a school?" The next day, we were running around with "wheelbarrows." We began to imagine the school of our dreams, a school that is wise, friendly, creative and tolerant. A school where children learn the most beautiful skills through playing theatre. Responsibility, courage, cleverness, and coping with every difficulty. A school with its own face, program ideas, *i.e.*, "author's school." (Hamerski, 2020d, para. 16)

In 1990, Jerzy and Elżbieta Drygas "[...] put everything on one card. In several rooms of the Youth Cultural Centre No. 2, they established a school, or rather a theatrical kindergarten" (Jarmuż & Sklepik, 2016, para. 2). Jerzy Hamerski, however, recalls that Elżbieta Drygas' early school education methods brought "fantastic results."

Elżbieta Drygas, like Jerzy, is the winner of the award given by children—Elżbieta is a Lady of the Order of the Smile, and Jerzy—a Knight of the Order of the Smile.

In 2017, this tandem was given the Irena Sendler Prize "for repairing the world"—an award granted since 2006 to teachers for whom work is a passion. Elżbieta Drygas and Jerzy Hamerski received this award as educators who jointly created the original Lejery Primary School in Poznań.

Among other things, theatre classes at the school they founded were considered valuable for improving the value of the world. It was noted that they are a "[...] way for children to get to know themselves, other people and the world around them" (Nagroda dla nauczycieli – za naprawianie świata, 2020), because the permanent canon of Lejery classics includes the plays *Romeo and Juliet* (about the confrontation of different social groups), *The Opera about Christopher Columbus* (about discovering multiculturalism), and *It's on fire* (about help and understanding) (Nagroda dla nauczycieli – za naprawianie świata, 2020, para. 2).

At some point, Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas decided that it was worth moving from a big city to a country cottage and lived in Rejowiec in what they call a "double-single house" (Hamerski, 2021, para. 7). In the house with blue shutters, a very nice female dog, Kreska, lived with the Lejery theatre girls until she was old, and the house is "guarded" by a dog with a truly theatrical name: Pierrot. Pierrot is the beloved dog of children studying at Primary School No. 83. Emilia Waśniowska in Poznań, because all students know this dog very well. Because the school's founders float between Poznań and a small house in Rejowiec, Pierrot usually accompanies them because he is very sociable and does not like being without his guardians. When this small, black and white mutt with brown eyes and a wagging tail runs into the school, he usually immediately heads towards the carpet—a common room located behind the harmonica for "little ones," who, when they see him scream with joy and show the dog

an extraordinary amount of tenderness. The dog, lying on its back amid the screams of delighted children, endures all caresses very bravely. Pierrot performs on stage at least once a year – during the traditional Łejery carol singing, during which children attending early school education classes, together with Jerzy Hamerski, present the Łejery “Kołędy Domowe” [Home’s Christmas Carols], which, as befits “home” ones, “have become at home permanently in the tradition of the school and the tradition of “song theatre” still successfully run by the founders of the institution. Pierrot performs on stage (although he is not a redhead, that doesn’t bother anyone) during the presentation of the Christmas carol “Red Mutt”:

- A Christmas carol was going on in the night,
- She saw a dog
- She stroked his head:
- You’ll go where I go.
- Christmas carol, Christmas carol – think for a second,
- You’re going to the stable. Why do you need this mongrel?
- Better leave, better leave
- leave this dog. (Chotomska, 2021, p. 17)

Even if a dog performs regularly on stage, everything that Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas “touch” begins to “throb” with theatre. The theatre is also buzzing with a hundred-year-old barn, which stands on the plot of Elżbieta and Jerzy’s house (Hamerski, 2021). The press wrote about the love for theatre instilled by the founders of the Łejery school in Rejowiec. In *Głos Wielkopolski* of October 17, 2011, Filip Czekala writes:

A few years ago, Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas, founders of the Łejery school, built their houses in Rejowiec on the outskirts of the Zielonka Forest. They wanted to rest here in peace after their well-deserved retirement. It was not given to them. (Czekala, 2011, para. 1)

The text states that Elżbieta Drygas found the place where she and Jerzy currently live beautiful because: “[...] near the forest, but in the middle of a small village next to the old primary school [...]. This children’s neighbourhood decided that there would be no retirement” (Czekala, 2011, para. 2). Elżbieta also mentions:

First, we did a provocation by enlarging the hole in the fence and the children started looking at us and talking to us [...]. We “bought” them quickly and knew that if we offered them a formula of theatrical play, they would get into it. (Czekala, 2011, para. 3)

In fact, in 2010, under the patronage of the City and Commune Library in Skoki, Łejery "theatre artists" launched a theatre at the Rejów school, because, as Jerzy Hamerski says, "you can't live without theatre" (Czekala, 2011, para. 4). He also mentions that:

The inauguration of the new theatre stage in Pałuki took place on the occasion of the National Education Day in the atmosphere of the Polish People's Republic, and as part of the city-village cultural exchange in Rejowiec, children from Łejery appeared in white and navy-blue uniforms. (Czekala, 2011, para. 5)

Summary

The Łejerska pedagogy and the school with a winged horse in its emblem and a theatre were created "out of dreams and experiences." The most eminent Polish artists cooperate and have cooperated with the school, and above all with Łejery, including: Wanda Chotomska, Witold Dębicki, Maria Rybarczyk, Aleksander Machalica, Piotr Gąsowski – also Łejery by upbringing: Grzegorz Kasdepke, Joanna Kulmowa, Joanna Papużyńska, Mariusz Matuszewski, Marcin Przewoźniak, Grzegorz Tomczak, Teresa Niewiarowska, Hanna Banaszak, Joanna Papużyńska, as well as the school's patron saint – the late w 2005, a wonderful poet, a long-time friend of the Łejery, patron of Primary School No. 34. poet and children's champion – Emilia Waśniowska. Among the lovers of Łejery pedagogy, we can also distinguish Professor Zbigniew Pilarczyk and Professor Heliodor Muszyński, great scientists representing the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań.

To sum up the assumptions of the Łejery pedagogy that has been developing over 50 years, it should be noted that Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas wanted

[...] children who leave school sensitive to nature, art, and other people, children who know and like themselves, who can cope with themselves and the world, striving for their self-development, wise, independent, brave, who are able and willing to choose the areas in which they will improve. Even if they make a mistake in this choice, they can happily start all over again in another field. (Czekala, 2016, p. 331)

Łejery pedagogy is democratic pedagogy, theatre pedagogy, and child-oriented pedagogy. Primary School No. 83 in Poznań is the only institution in the country implementing a pedagogical experiment by education through theatre.

Łejery pedagogy is undoubtedly the result of Jerzy Hamerski's family and early pedagogical experiences, and the fact that it has systemic solutions is due to the harmonious cooperation of Jerzy and Elżbieta Drygas.

The proof of the effective implementation of the assumptions of the Łejery pedagogy is not only numerous statements by people associated with the school and theatre, not also the existence of Łejery for 50 years, but also the extremely rich artistic achievements of Łejery,

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