

**PROFESSOR WACŁAW SZYBALSKI  
ON LWÓW, GENES,  
THE ESSENCE OF LIFE,  
AND NOBEL LAUREATES**

*In memory of my wife, Wanda —  
the good soul of this book*

Jarosław Abramow-Newerly

*On the one hand, the most important thing in life is to create something,  
on the other, to have friends, to work, not to turn away from life.  
You have to be brave. Finally, you must achieve and do something.  
Do something good for Poland and for Lwów.*

Wacław Szybalski

Jarosław Abramow-Newerly

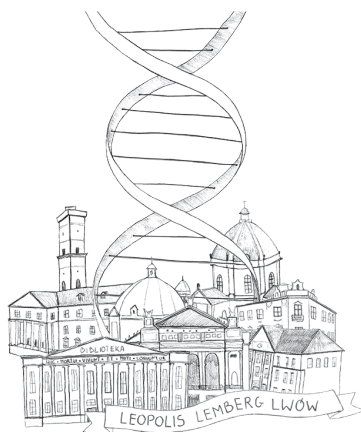
---

**PROFESSOR WAŁAW SZYBALSKI  
ON LWÓW, GENES,  
THE ESSENCE OF LIFE,  
AND NOBEL LAUREATES**

Scientific cooperation, footnotes, supplementing memories,  
selection and description of photographs

Irena Frączek

Translated by  
David Malcolm



PROFESSOR WAŁAW SZYBALSKI FOUNDATION  
GDAŃSK UNIVERSITY PRESS  
GDAŃSK 2020

Reviewers

Prof. Wiesław Makarewicz  
Prof. Anna Skorupska  
Prof. Grzegorz Węgrzyn  
Stanisław Kosiedowski

Substantial editors

Prof. Ewa Łojkowska in cooperation with Joanna Kamień

Editorial work on the English translation of this biography, and the addition of a few more interesting Szybalski family stories, was undertaken and completed by Barbara (Basia) Hunter-Sandor, the daughter of Professor Szybalski

Technical editing and DTP

Michał Janczewski

Cover, endpapers, and title pages design

Daria Murawska

*The Essence of Life* – a film directed by Anna Ferens

Producer – Małgorzata Matuszewska

Production – Faster Piotr Matuszewski

This film was made under the honorary patronage of Prof. Maciej Żylicz

This film was financed jointly by the Foundation for Polish Science  
and the Polish Film Institute

The publication of this book was financed by:

Professor Waław Szybalski Foundation

Rector of the University of Gdańsk

Vice-Rector for Research of the University of Gdańsk



© Copyright by the Professor Waław Szybalski Foundation

ISBN 978-83-8206-015-7

Gdańsk University Press

ul. Armii Krajowej 119/121, 81-824 Sopot  
tel./fax +48 58 523 11 37, tel. +48 725 991 206  
e-mail: [wydawnictwo@ug.edu.pl](mailto:wydawnictwo@ug.edu.pl)  
[www.wyd.ug.edu.pl](http://www.wyd.ug.edu.pl)

Online bookstore: [www.kiw.ug.edu.pl](http://www.kiw.ug.edu.pl)

Printed and bound by

Zakład Poligrafii Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego  
ul. Armii Krajowej 119/121, 81-824 Sopot  
tel. +48 58 523 14 49, fax +48 58 551 05 32

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**PREFACE** (*Jerzy Barankiewicz*) · 9

**INTRODUCTION** · 13

**Chapter 1. THE EARLY YEARS IN LWÓW** · 17

The welcoming home of the Szybalski family · 17

Two great families meet · 31

The era of grandfather Rakowski · 39

Children of Lwów's Merry Wave · 40

Wacek was no grind · 54

Look at Szybalski soar! · 60

Always upward! · 63

Big brother, little brother · 66

Best in everything · 70

At president Mościcki's · 76

**Chapter 2. THE TRAGEDY OF TWO OCCUPATIONS** · 83

A dispute over the shininess of a townhouse · 83

The siege of Lwów · 88

Don't join the party and don't steal too much! · 91

The lice here are the best, Mr. Khrushchev! · 97

The Stalin scholarship · 102

Yeast have sex · 106

A private power plant · 110

I worked for Professor Weigl · 114

The expedition to Bełżec · 123

### **Chapter 3. IN A NEW HOME**

**WITH TWO LOAVES OF BLACK BREAD · 129**

A unique diploma · 129

Nothing behind the wardrobe · 136

High in the mountains · 143

Give me back my family signet ring · 145

Horses at the Gdańsk University of Technology · 149

### **Chapter 4. NOT TO GET CUT OFF**

**FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD · 165**

We are standing on the shoulders of giants · 165

The ministerial aunt · 172

Iron bacteria behind the iron curtain · 181

Bohr and the PhD · 189

A visa in ten years · 194

### **Chapter 5. SPREADING HIS WINGS · 201**

The phage church · 201

Hats off, gentlemen! · 211

Is this the Szybalski who criticized me? · 222

Please, spare me the sermon! · 225

Wacław, come at once! · 228

Let us laugh and look into each other's eyes · 233

### **Chapter 6. THE WHIMS OF THE GREATEST · 237**

I dreamed of having such a beautiful manor · 237

The “arrest” in Rotterdam and the wedding · 245

*Pohulanka* in Bound Brook–Martinsville · 252

The Polish reality of 1958 · 255

You don't say no to a Nobel laureate · 259

**Chapter 7. TO BE AHEAD OF YOUR TIME · 271**

Forty kilometers to the Polish border · 271

At the border of scientific fantasy · 279

Two periods in biology · 292

**Chapter 8. SOLDIER ON TOWARD THE GOAL · 295**

The red, white and blue spine of *Gene* · 295

Loyal to the masters of his youth · 312

A dance with Meryl Streep · 319

Dad has four “granddaughters” · 322

**Chapter 9. TO HAVE AN IDEA FOR EVERYONE · 331**

Scientific avarice · 331

We were beaten by the liver · 342

Generosity to rival that of an industrialist · 352

You must be mentally resilient! · 358

**Chapter 10. I AM AN ENGINEER FROM LWÓW · 365**

A presentation in a surgical cap · 365

In Poland with Watson · 369

An engineer from Lwów · 384

**MEETINGS WITH PROFESSOR SZYBALSKI · 391**

In the footsteps of Professor Szybalski (*Magdalena Gierszewska*) · 391

Those Lwów genes (*Irena Frączek*) · 399

**ANNEX**

List of most significant publications · 423

**INDEX OF PERSONS · 459**