



Summary

Tale – Nation – Death

On the Late Political Works of Jarosław

Marek Rymkiewicz

This book – as the subtitle suggests – ponders the late political works of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, a talented poet, essayist, Romanticism scholar, and at the same time one of the codifiers of 20th century Polish classicism. The politicalness of his later writings is best reflected by Ryszard Koziołek’s comment, taken from his review of the last tome in the “Polish tetralogy,” a series of essays in which Rymkiewicz – meanderingly examining select events from Polish history – developed historiosophic divagations on the essence and continuance of the Polish nation. Rymkiewicz’s tetralogy comprises *Wieszanie* (*The Hangings*) (2007), *Kinderszenen* (2008), *Samuel Zborowski* (2010), and *Reytan. Upadek Polski* [*Reytan. The Fall of Poland*]. Commenting on the last essay, Koziołek noticed that, through his tetralogy, Rymkiewicz, “enraging a great many people, for a moment gave historical-philological drudgery the fierceness of a street demonstration, elevating historical-literary notes to the rank of a political act.” It is this very “political act” (from the years 2007–2014) of the elderly writer, often dubbed the “bloody bard of the right” or (depending on one’s sympathies) the “bard/Wernyhora from Milanówek,” that this book focuses on.

Within it, the category of politicalness will mostly be treated broadly, as one referring to the area of conflict between different visions of the organization of human coexistence. I thematize mainly select “late” works of Rymkiewicz, meaning texts created in the 21st century. More specifically, those that translated into the aforementioned phenomenon of “social influence” – the writer’s Polish tetralogy and select “civic” (the writer’s own term) poems. The titular “tale – nation – death” are, through my lens, three keywords that make possible a reading of the tetralogy and the selected poems of the artist that appreciates both the literary and the political dimensions present in the works of the author of *Czym jest klasycyzm* [*What Is Classicism*]. In my attempt to conduct this reading, I’ve employed a diverse range of research tools. On this book’s pages (drawing from the “Rymkiewiczological” findings – mainly of: Grzegorz Marzec, Mariusz Kalandyk, Dorota Wojda) I refer mostly to the findings of narrativists – Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit. Their works help shed light on the purposefulness of Rymkiewicz’s choices regarding the way he described Polish history. Dominick LaCapra’s research devoted to the issue of trauma (especially that on foundational trauma) and deep reflection on the problematics of the categories of memory and tradition were also of import. It could also hardly neglect to mention my debt towards philosophers who conceptualize the category of the sublime (especially Schiller). The research problem I explore is connected to the

tendency to sacralize the Polish national community visible in the 21st century, of which Rymkiewicz's works are the most noticeable example – albeit not the only one, which I also mention in the book. The first three chapters are an attempt at a holistic reading of the famed Polish tetralogy, one that takes into account its literary and philosophical contexts. The next part of this work is devoted to select political poems of *Kinderszenen*'s author. The fifth chapter juxtaposes Rymkiewicz's works with those of younger authors, oftentimes unabashedly showing their fascination with the penmanship of *Żmūt*'s author. The chapter simultaneously presents the specifics of the literary tendency co-created by them, which I have termed as contemporary national literature. Finally, the sixth chapter and the conclusion problematize the ironic, as I demonstrate, split (in Kierkegaard's terms – duality) noticeable in Rymkiewicz's late works.

Through this duality, the absolute of Polishness painstakingly constructed by the poet is – surprisingly and, as one should think, intentionally – undermined and brought to the rank of a mirage (possibly necessary for human/Polish existence), making way for another – dark, nullifying power present in Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's works. The power of death.