

## **Beyond the circle of the Quadriga.**

### **The poetic worldview of Władysław Sebyła and Lucjan Szenwald**

#### **Summary**

The doctoral thesis “Beyond the circle of the Quadriga. The poetic worldview of Władysław Sebyła and Lucjan Szenwald” consists of two parts: “Beyond the circle of the Quadriga” (1) and “God the Father and Mother Nature” (2).

The first part deals with work and life of the subjects of the study. The following are discussed: the Quadriga period, the 1930s, and finally the war years. The issue of reception of their work is also considered: firstly, the works of poets who co-created “The Quadriga” (1927-1931), and secondly, Władysław Sebyła and Lucjan Szenwald, who had emancipated from its circle. Tracing their presence in Polish culture from the post-war period to the present day consists in a multifaceted examination of not only texts devoted directly to them, but also radio broadcasts, press mentions, encyclopedic entries, school and even academic textbooks.

In order to obtain necessary information I conducted researches in several academic centers and cultural institutions. In the Jagiellonian Library I found the archival issues of "The Quadriga", in the Warsaw Museum of Literature – the manuscripts of Sebyła and Szenwald, their correspondence and belongings, in the Lublin Literary Museum – Sabina Sebyłowa's briefcase (including: press clippings on quadrigants, editorial and private correspondence of poets, notes from meetings, settlements, receipts, notes and "flashcards"). The above materials were supplemented with documents collected in the Władysław Sebyła's Memorial Chamber in the Municipal Cultural Center in Kłobuck, in the Public Library in Kłobuck and in Stefan Flukowski's Room in the Pomeranian Library in Szczecin, as well as in the University Library in Warsaw, in the Museum of Emeryk Hutten-Czapski and at the Katyn Museum. A completely separate part of the research was a query in the Archives of Polish Radio, proving the important role the radio played not only in the reception of Sebyła, Szenwald and the Quadriga, but also in the lives of the poets themselves.

In the following parts of the chapter on the Quadriga, the issue of the group's patrons, the story of “The New Quadriga” and position of another outstanding member of this circle – Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, are briefly discussed. The last of the issues, called "*casus* of Gałczyński and the criterion of eminence", is connected with the necessity to justify the selection of Sebyła and Szenwald from among the Quadriga as heroes of a doctoral dissertation devoted to this group. Why, in this kind of comparative study, should not the

place of one of them be taken by Stefan Flukowski, the one who also stood out from the group? An answer to this question is provided by the very dynamics of the second part – the dynamics that requires the presence of two parental figures: God the Father and Mother Nature.

The title pair is the main axis of the second part of the thesis. Reflection on the mature and independent period in the work of each poet is built around God the Father (Sebyła) and Mother Nature (Szenwald). It therefore becomes natural that the chapter on Sebyła opens with an interpretation of the poem *Our Father* [*Ojciec nasz*], followed by studies of the more subtle traces of God. It quickly turns out that in the case of the author of *The Egotic Concerto* [*Koncert egotyczny*] these studies do not trace the Father's absence as much as they examine dialectics based on closeness and remoteness. To understand various incarnations of God the Father, it is helpful to trace the more subtle hints of His Name: wax figures from the Ratcatcher's *Panopticum*, the darkness from *The Egotic Concerto* and the melancholic landscapes of the *Mills. Inhuman Sonata* [*Młyny. Sonata nieludzka*]. The feeling of being abandoned by God is thus expressed not only in artless lamentations, but also in the darkness of a deserted world that has been cut off from the source of its meaning.

At the same time, the parallel and counterweight to Sebyła's God the Father is Szenwald's Mother Nature. I decided to focus on the most outstanding work of the poet, which in my opinion is *My Mother's Kitchen* [*Kuchnia mojej matki*]. Its ambivalent, yet life-giving and deadly countenance is shed by other works which can be used to build a concentric arrangement around the main poem: *The Crescent Moon* [*Przybierający księżyc*], *Bicycle* [*Rower*], *Scene by the Stream* [*Scena przy strumieniu*], as well as more conventionalized front lines.

The second part uses the contexts and diagnoses introduced in the first part, while at the same time crossing them towards the question about the topicality of each poet's work. "Beyond the circle of the Quadriga", part of the historical and literary spirit, is 'servant' to the second part only in the sense that by introducing into the necessary context of the literary, cultural and social conditions of the Polish interwar period, it allows for further reflection on the key problem of work of two parental figures.

Meeting contemporary contexts, the works of Sebyła and Szenwald come to life, becoming extremely up-to-date. Due to this vitality, they call into question their belonging to their mother era, which in turn leads to the need of rethinking the already established

historical and literary categories. If we want to name what is new in their thoughts, and also completely innovative in the perspective of two decades of their work, we can mention threads close to post-secularism (Sebyła) and posthumanism (Szenwald). For me, however, it is above all the great value of building a relationship with the worldview of poets who made their debut almost a hundred years ago – to discover their closeness. The question of topicality is the axis of this work, parallel to the narrative about God the Father and Mother Nature.

Categories of "catastrophism" and "metaphysical" among the historical and literary terms are being examined with particular attention. I devote a separate chapter to the first of them, considering it not only in the context of the works of the subjects of my study, nor the diagnoses of Polish literary historians, but also in the light of philosophical and cultural research. I study "metaphysicality" in the context of problems of Szenwald's poetry, which – especially in the presence of Sebyła, who is often called with the adjective "metaphysical" – may surprise in the first instance.

Finally, the issue of the phrase "poetic worldview" used in the title requires a separate discussion. I treat it as a category that can contain a wide spectrum of problems inherent in the work of each of the subjects of the study. For each of the former quadrigants the category of imagination turns out to be somehow insufficient; like "vision", both for Sebyła and for Szenwald, it is only one of several components of their poetic thinking.

At the end of the chapters on God the Father and Mother Nature, there are brief subsections on traditions from which the imagination of each of the poets have taken its source. I treat these small additions as contributions that can be expanded in the course of further reflection on each of these works – e.g. in studies more focused on looking for the sources of a specific poetic diction or poetic imagery. In my perception of each of the poets, finding and charting new paths of thinking turns out to be more important. I call it the "third way" for each of them.

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