

Sickness and Death of the Body Politic in Early Modern Poland

Republic's Lamentation in Literature and Political Discourse

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Abstract. The political and moral crisis experienced by the noble estate of the Crown of Poland in the sixteenth and seventeenth century found its sincerest expression in the laments of the Republic. Beginning from the 1522 *Epitaphium Reipublicae* by Andrzej Krzycki, this literary tradition drew on classical, particularly Ciceronian imagery of a sick and dying body politic. Over the next decades, this imagery became intertwined with political discourse, as evidenced by parliamentary speeches from 1562–64. In the same period, Jan Dymitr Solikowski penned *Facies Rei Publicae*, an immensely popular narrative of the healing of the body politic, and created figurative representations of Sick and Sane Republic; while Stanisław Samuel Szemiot, writing over a century later, craftily adapted Hippocratean concepts in a poetical necropsy of the body politic. Most importantly, the aforementioned authors all shared a genuine belief that their political community was in decay, and their own life imperiled. A careful reading of the textual pathologies they created allows for a diagnosis of historico-philosophical roots of their anxiety.

Keywords: body politic, Early Modern Poland, Neo-Latin literature, Old Polish literature, lament, epitaph, noble republicanism, history of medicine

*Mostruoso è chi è nato
dalle viscere di una donna morta.*
Pier Paolo Pasolini

Introduction

The aim of this overview of chosen literary texts from Early Modern Poland is to provide testimony to the persistent popularity of the metaphor of body politic in its ancient form, expressed most vividly in the Ciceronian tradition and rooted in the

philosophy of Classical Greece.¹ The depictions of a sick or even dead body politic testify that from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Polish citizens perceived their political community as a *natural* body, prone to sickness and death. Such imagery, correlated to a shared experience of societal crisis and uncertainty, provided writers and orators with a manifold of ways to represent their political predicament. The claim that the body of the Republic is sick was accepted as uncontroversial, which allowed for investigation, diagnosis, prescription and even dissection. Moreover, political actors involved in this discourse disagreed over the nature and role of various parts of the body in which they participated; as one would expect, they argued over which member is the origin of its corruption and what means are to be undertaken for the sake of healing.

The literary tradition that concerns us originated in the context of Polish noble republicanism, a peculiarly Polish phenomenon which one could perhaps describe as a very distinct variation of civic humanism, or, alternatively, a gentry radicalism.² It encompasses texts both Neo-Latin and Old Polish, with a shift towards the vernacular becoming visible since the mid-sixteenth century. The steadily growing amount of humanist literature available in the vernacular corresponded to the rise of civic participation, which started to spread far beyond the most affluent magnate families, whose members were assembled in the Senate, a powerful advisory body to the King. The more numerous middle nobility, represented by Izba Poselska (the House of Envoys), challenged the political and economical position of the senatorial elite. The conflict within the noble estate, known as *szlachta* or *ordo equestris*, was often framed with concepts inherited from Latin historiography, particularly those pertaining to the strife between the patricians and the plebeians.³ Its institutional setting included the sessions of the Sejm, a parliamentary body of tripartite structure, composed of the King, the Senate and the House of Envoys, as well as armed acts of rebellion or civic disobedience by the mass of nobles, known as *rokosz* and often compared to *secessio* or *seditio* from the times of Republican Rome.⁴

1 The article presents outcomes of a research project funded by the National Science Centre, Poland: *Idea Apocalyptica seu Apocalypsis Stanislai Orichovii. Edition, translation and interpretation of a Pseudo-Orichovian eschatologico-political apocrypha*, Reg. No.: 2020/37/N/HS1/02549. My gratitude goes to Jonathan Egid for carefully reading the draft of this paper and discussing it.

2 Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Noble republicanism*; Gniazdowski, *Radykalizm szlachecki*.

3 Althoen, *Natione Polonus*, 479–83.

4 Cnapius, *Thesaurus Polonolatinograecus*, T. 1, 924; Czubek, ed., *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 421. See also Fedorowicz, Bogucka, and Samsonowicz, eds, *A Glossary of Polish Terms*, XV.

The Coroner Andrzej Krzycki

Before turning to the ways in which the aforementioned struggle unfolded—most vividly at the Sejms of the 1560s—I shall comment upon an earlier text, a Neo-Latin poem which is perhaps the first lament of the Republic written in the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. It appeared as *Religionis et Reipublicae querimonia*, penned by Andrzej Krzycki (Andreas Cricius) and published in 1522.

Krzycki's *querimonia* were slightly predated by Valentin Eck's *Ad Sigismundum Regem Poloniae threni neglectae religionis* from 1518, which is believed to be the first humanist lament published in Poland. However, it was Krzycki who initiated the tradition of the laments of the Republic. He was soon followed by Klemens Janicki (Clemens Ianicius) with his 1538 *Querela Reipublicae* and by Mikołaj Rej, who introduced this topic to the Old Polish verse. Rej concluded his *Krótka rozprawa* with a querela of Rzeczpospolita (1543); another Old Polish verse dialogue, written in 1549 and featuring complaints of the wretched Republic, is also attributed to Rej.⁵

Republic is most typically presented as wretched and impoverished, and almost always as a mother suffering a betrayal of her infidelous sons, the noble citizens, who prefer to pursue private wealth.⁶ The opposition between *res publica* and *privata* recurs in a majority of these texts and is most vividly expressed by the dialogue attributed to Rej, which features bitter slanders and threats uttered by Privat and his Wife.⁷ Another popular topos is that of imminent ruin of the political community, which remains unnoticed by the citizens, who, blinded by their self-interest, accelerate the collapse even further.⁸

In the course of decades, the lament of an impersonated body politic or political concept became a popular, conventionalized genre of Old Polish literature.⁹ Its formal model emerged at the dawn of the seventeenth century and wielded considerable influence for more than a hundred years. Its last notable occurrences came with a sudden explosion of anonymous political texts related to the Confederation of Bar, a popular rebellion of petty nobles against Russian dominance and magnate elites lasting from 1768 to 1772. In addition to Republic, the protagonists of such laments included Poland, Motherland, Freedom or Noble Freedom, Religion, Faith, Church,

5 Rej, *Lament Rzeczypospolitej*.

6 Rej, *Krótką rozprawa*, 2033–40; Janicki, *Querela Reipublicae*, 103–6.

7 Rej, *Lament Rzeczypospolitej*, 301. See also: Krzycki, *Religionis et Reipublicae querimonia*, I, 1–2; II, 1–4; III, 5–6; Janicki, *Querela Reipublicae*, 11–14.

8 Rej, *Krótką rozprawa*, 2049–64; Rej, *Lament Rzeczypospolitej*, 299.

9 Eustachiewicz, *Twórczość Dominika Rudnickiego (1676–1739)*, 137; Cytowska, *Kwerela i heroida alegoryczna*, 486–88, 500–3; Buchwald-Pelcowa, *Satyra czasów saskich*, 143–68.

Lithuania or Lechia;¹⁰ notably, the seventeenth century witnesses a turn from the prevalence of Republic and Religion towards Freedom, Poland and Motherland.

Krzycki's verse is unique and of particular interest not only because it involves the first complaint of impersonified Republic in Polish humanism, but also due to the image of a dead body politic. The future bishop concludes his *querimonia* with an epitaph. He provides precise descriptions of the mortal sickness of the deceased, in which a critique of public morality goes hand in hand with medical terms:

“Here lies the Republic, undone by two diseases:
 confusion of the people and discord among the fathers.
 Their sins arise from wicked liberty,
 pursuit of private weal and contempt for the old faith.
 She languished long, insulted by these vices,
 exhausted with mistreated maladies,
 and incurable dropsy slithered into her veins,
 the source and origin of all further diseases.
 The only medicine which buttressed her faculties
 was of religion and princely probity.
 Her sanity was kept and her life delivered
 ‘til dropsy drained her severed faculties.
 Henceforth she is overflowen by incessant confusion
 and welfare of the people is utterly destroyed.
 Bewail, o blinded people, ye gentlemen and fathers,
 for with this death your weal and fortune perish!”¹¹

According to Krzycki, the body of the republic succumbs to dropsy. I will explain the reason behind the choice of this peculiar disease in the further stages of exploring this literary tradition, when dealing with texts which feature more comprehensive patophysiological examination.

The learned author introduces medical imagery only after enumerating moral vices of the political community which led to the demise of the Republic. These include: 1) “confusion of the people” (*turbae populi*) and “discord among the fathers”

10 Kolbuszewski, ed., *Poezja barska*; Maciejewski, ed., *Literatura barska*.

11 Krzycki, *Religionis et Reipublicae querimonia*, III, 3–18: “Publica res iacet hic morbis extincta duobus, / Turbinibus populi dissidioque patrum. / Cuius causa mali libertas prava reique / Privatae studium pulsaque prisca fides. / Languerat dudum vitiis obnoxia tantis / Et male curatis extenuata malis, / Serpebat venis sensim insatiabilis hydrops / Qui morbis aliis fons et origo fuit, / Una tamen medica quae vires arte levabat / Religio et probitas principis una fuit. / Hactenus hic sarcita salus productaque vita; / Hic spretis vires auctus ademit hydrops, / Ex quo manarunt turbarum protinus undae, / In quibus extincta est publica tota salus. / Lugete, o caeci populi proceresque patresque, / Nam morte hac et res et bona vestra ruunt”. Translated by the author.

(*dissidium patrum*), 2) “wicked liberty” (*libertas prava*), 3) “pursuit of private weal” (*rei privatae studium*) and 4) attack upon the old faith (*pulsa prisca fides*). All of them, and particularly 1, 3 and 4, occur commonly in the humanist laments and originate from the Latin literature, which is most vividly attested by the juxtaposition of the people and the fathers, both of which bear responsibility for the crisis.

It is also in the Classical Latin tradition in which Krzycki was most likely to find the images of the tormented body politic. Cicero’s writings are abundant in phrases such as *res publica aegrotata* (sick), *debilitata* (maimed), *disiecta* (broken up), *prostrata* (prostrated) or *perdita* (ruined).¹² He describes her as suffering pestilence (*pestis*) and disease (*morbis*), and, in more detail, gangraena, wounds (*sica*), groins (*inguen*), ulcers (*vomicae*) or scrofula (*struma*).¹³ Most interestingly, the Arpinate develops a certain degree of systematic metaphorical pathology, identifying demagogues with a chosen disease, so that Catiline is depicted as *pestis* or *morbis Reipublicae* and Clodius as an ulcerous groin on her body.¹⁴ Such imagery, although most common in Cicero, is employed by other writers, Varro and Quintilian among them, while Plutarch provides evidence that Sulla was accused of a parricide of motherland, *paricidium patriae*, and identified as her murderer, *φονεὺς τῆς πατρίδος*.¹⁵

Krzycki’s poem inaugurates the topos of the sick body politic in the literature of early modern Poland. He is to be credited as the first coroner of the deceased Republic. However, he remains highly dependent on classical patterns and his *querimonia* do not feature any of the remarkable traits which emerge in the later tradition. Modelled on concepts imported directly from the Romans, *Religionis et Reipublicae querimonia* remain rather detached from contemporary political discourse and seem to bear no resemblance with texts such as parliamentary orations or pamphlets.¹⁶ Medical imagery, although well noticeable, is limited to a single term and it is necessary to delve into later developments in order to gain a clearer insight into how Polish republican authors employed Hippocratic tradition in political writing.

The Head of a Sick Body or the Wise Physician

The conflict between the senators and the middle nobility reached its peak at the Sejms of 1562–63 and 1563–64. The sessions were dedicated first and foremost to

12 Walters, *The Deaths of the Republic*, 53–70, 89–108.

13 Walters, *The Deaths of the Republic*, 17–24, 27–64.

14 Cicero, in *Catilinam*, I. 2, 11, 22, 30, 33; II. 1, 2; IV. 3; Cicero, *De Domo sua*, 12. After: Walters 30–31.

15 Plutarch, *Sulla*, 32, 2. After: Walters, 105. See also Cicero, *Philippicae*, II, 17; IV, 5; XI, 29.

16 For a Romantic critique of the influence of humanist classicism on social struggle see Mickiewicz, *Les slaves*, II, (XXVIII), 43–49.

the question of the so-called ‘execution’, that is the alienation, of the royal domain. The reformers who championed the executionist programme saw the royal domain as a common wealth, *bonum commune*. Stanisław Zaborowski, a lawyer active in the early sixteenth century, stressed that the king is but a caretaker or administrator of the Crown and his domain, and proposed to describe his role with terms such as *administrator regni, tutor, conservator, rector, mediator* or *praepositus*.¹⁷ The noble republicans remained faithful to the tradition established as early as in the times of Cicero, who famously coined the concept of *rector rei publicae*, and developed later in the work of medieval jurists.

However, the most affluent families enjoyed many dubious privileges, such as lifetime leases or exclusive property rights which were illegally handed down to successive generations. They exerted tolls and duties, and obtained staple rights for their private cities. Moreover, it was not uncommon to see a high official holding many legally incompatible posts (*incompatibilia*). The mighty houses benefited from the relative weakness of the Jagiellonian dynasty, whose representants lacked a good alternative to the donation-based personal policy.¹⁸ Hence the interests of the ruling house appeared relatively concurrent with the aspirations of the middle nobility, who underlined the nominal equality among all of the members of the equestrian order, subjects to the same law.¹⁹

The Sejm of 1562–63 convened after more than three years without a session. The break was due to the King’s engagement in the Livonian war, which kept him away from the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. Instead, he resided in his other realm, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The nobles pressed for assembling and, using semi-legal means, managed to draw the King back to Poland in order to settle the cause of the execution and to push towards a systematic revision of dubious privileges. The heated atmosphere was fuelled not only by social conflict, but also by uncertainty regarding the future of the monarchy—Sigismund Augustus had no legitimate heir—as well as religious dissent and challenges posed by the warlike neighbours of the vast, barely controllable lands of Poland and Lithuania. A letter written by the executionist to the senators in the build-up to the Sejm presents the Republic as “an edifice, which, as soon as great winds push it from its quoin, is menaced by an imminent ruin.”²⁰

17 Litwin, *Stanisława Zaborowskiego życie*, XLV. See also Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 372–83.

18 Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1, 431–55.

19 Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *The Political Discourse*, 39–54.

20 “[...] budowanie, które gdy od wielkich wiatrów ze wszystkich stron z węglów wystąpi, pewnie ruiną jest zagrożone”. BCz, ms 1604, s. 46–51. After: Dembińska, *Polityczna walka o egzekucję*, 53. All translations from Polish are of my authorship.

Parliamentary sessions abounded with fine pieces of rhetoric. The speeches were held in Old Polish. I will focus on two of them: the envoy's greeting (*witanie poselskie*) proffered by Rafał Leszczyński, Marshal of the House of Envoys at the Sejm of Piotrków, and the parliamentary proposition (*propozycja sejmowa*) from the subsequent Sejm of Warsaw, by Piotr Myszkowski, Vice-Chancellor and, by the virtue of holding this office, a member of the Senate.

The envoy's greeting, addressed to the King, was an opening speech conventionally delivered by the Marshal. Leszczyński spoke on 30 November 1562; a few days earlier the royal court arrived to Piotrków, where the session was to be held. As Marcin Bielski's chronicle famously recounts:

“It was a great and famous Sejm, almost like the day of judgement, for the King arrived to Piotrków with all his court dressed in grey, which he regarded as the landsmen's colour. And this time he did not sojourn in the tower, but entered into the wooden manor of Bugaj on the shore of the Bugaj pond, with drums, trumpet and volley.”²¹

The court's attire testifies that the King intended to side with the House of Envoys. Marshal Leszczyński, one of the leading figures of the so called executionists, welcomed him with a dramatic address. He spoke of “signs of Divine wrath, a sign of death and ruin”²² and asked the monarch to “heale this sick body, of which thou are deigned to be the very head; for the sane body shall perish, and even head shall not remain uphold!”²³ Moreover, Leszczyński introduced the metaphor of “a wasteful trunk”, which “keeps from attaining unto the good and is the cause of fall, and no other men can throw it down nor push it away, save the very person of Thine Royal Grace!”²⁴ This metaphor, undubitably inspired by the Biblical stumbling-block, pertains to the donations and privileges, granted by the King to the magnates.²⁵ It definitely enjoyed much popularity, as we infer from a few mentions in further speeches of various noble citizens, also at the subsequent session in Warsaw (1563–64).

21 “Wielki to był i zawołany sejm, i prawie jako sądny dzień, na który król do Piotrkowa przyjechał dwór swój wszystek w szarzą ubrawszy, barwę tę ziemiańską nazywając; i już nie do wieże, ale do Bugaju dworu drzewianego nad stawem Bugajem zsiadł, z bębny, z trąbami i z strzelbą.” [Bielski], *Kronika Marcina Bielskiego*, 1143.

22 “Zaiste, to są znaki gniewu Bożego, znak zginienia a upadku!”. Działyński, ed., *Zrzodlopisma*, 5.

23 “[...] ulecz to chore ciało, którego sam głową raczysz być, bo zaginieli ciało zdrowe, i głowa w swej całości nie zostanie!” *Zrzodlopisma*, 6.

24 “[...] zrzuc ten szkodliwy pień z drogi, który zawadza do dobrego, który jest przyczyną do upadku, a zrzucić go ani zepchnąć żaden inszy z ludzi niemoże, okromia osoby Waszej Królewskiej Zaczności!” *Zrzodlopisma*, 6.

25 Matthew 13:41, 16:23, 18:7, 17:1; Romans 9:33, 11:9, 14:13, 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 6:11, 1 Peter 2:8, 1 John 2:10, Apocalypse 2:14.

Leszczyński depicts the King as the head of the body politic—perhaps conventionally—and immediately stresses that, consequently, his health is dependent on the health of the other parts. In the spirit of his times, he sees the political reform as the question of public morality and ethics, which is, at the end of the day, of eschatological significance—hence the Biblical allusion. Moreover, Leszczyński, Protestant Christian, member and patron of the Czech Brethren, publically defines the nature and scope of what one may ironically term the divine right of the King:

“[...] Lord God Almighty endowed Thine Royal Grace with such heart, that thou art willing to advance with the restoration of our violated and neglected laws. Neither flesh nor blood in the heart of Thine Royal Grace have done this, but the Divine Spirit himself.”²⁶

The King’s intention to side with the executionists does not derive from his personal will nor reason, but from Divine inspiration. Law enjoyed authority comparable to that of the King’s and thence Leszczyński seems to suggest that the restoration of laws, the ultimate source of which is God, the first lawgiver, is a Divine Work of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The figure of kingship that emerges from these lines is very characteristic of the republican nobility, who widely accepted sacral authority of their kings, but strived to minimize their political agency, a tendency which found its most perfect expression in the Henrician Articles. The Articles, instituted in 1573, were a constitution in the form of a permanent contract between the monarch and the nobility, and each newly elected King was obligated to swear to uphold them. They were famously praised by *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, the most outspoken manifesto of the monarchomachs.²⁸

The sacred King belongs to the body politic and mediates between the community and God. His theologico-political mediation is necessary, but the actions he undertakes as the King are not his own, but Divine, or, to phrase it with the famous metaphor, belong strictly to his Divine body.²⁹ He is the only one able to “throw down the wasteful trunk” —as it was him or his predecessor who earlier distributed the donations and privileges—and it is expected that he will govern the parts of the body in order to maintain harmony or, more explicitly, equality within the noble estate, shattered by the burgeoning magnate families.

26 “A to, iż Pan Bóg wszechmogący dał to serce Waszej Królewskiej Zaczności, że chcesz naprawę uczynić skażonym a zaniedbałym prawom naszym. Tegoż ciało a krew w sercu Waszej Królewskiej Zaczności nie uczyniło, ale sam tylko Duch Boży.” *Zrzodlopisma*, 6.

27 Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *The Political Discourse*, 39–54.

28 Lukowski, *The Szlachta and the Monarchy*; Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 82, 133–34.

29 Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 7–23.

Myszkowski's proposition,³⁰ although delivered a year later, on 22 November 1563, at the Sejm of Warsaw, is the most thorough answer to Leszczyński, at least within contemporary parliamentary discourse. According to the convention, proposition was an address of a royal official to the envoys, an outline of the political programme of the King and his Chancellery, and followed the envoys' greeting. By the time, the Chancellery was undergoing a generational transition, and new officials, influenced by republican ideals, were on the rise.³¹ This was marked most vividly by the career of Walenty Dembiński, one of the leaders of the *rokosz* of 1537, who assumed chancellorship in April 1564. Vice-Chancellor Myszkowski, although few years younger than Dembiński, represented the old conservative elites and their drive towards maintaining influence over the court and keeping the "plebeians" from becoming a political subject in their own right.³²

Just as Leszczyński, Myszkowski speaks of imminent ruin; however, his narrative is focused on the King's proactive role: the monarch is aware of the dangers and always acts towards containing them. He addresses the envoys as the sons of the Republic who, according to the tradition of the humanist laments, is depicted as their sick mother. Moreover, he proffers admonishments, reportedly on behalf of the King. The nobles shall deliberate over her healing "not as fallen and decaying limbs of a body succumbing to unhealed disease [...] but as fresh, whole limbs of the Republic, still enjoying good health in God's grace."³³ The suggestion is clear: the reformers, who intend to save the sick body politic, may well be the very origin of its diseases.

Myszkowski further elaborates on the King's deeds, calling him a "benign father". Willing to heal the body of the Republic, he acts as "a wise physician", and allows for its nourishment.³⁴ The medicine invoked by the Vice-Chancellor is the so-called 'quarter army', a newly introduced regular force founded from the 'quarter tax', i.e. one-fourth of the income from the Crown lands.³⁵ Notably, Myszkowski presents it as a personal sacrifice of the King, therefore ignoring the tradition according to which he was not an owner, but a caretaker and administrator of the Crown understood as common wealth.³⁶

30 *Zrzodlopisma*, 191–99.

31 Mirosław Korolko speaks of the generation of "secretaries-executionists"; Korolko, *Seminarium Rzeczypospolitej*, 99–100.

32 Tomczak, *Walenty Dembiński*, 64–104.

33 "[...] ażeby nie jako upadłe a zmartwiałe członki ciała nieuleczoną chorobą złożonego, które ani sobą władać, ani żadnej zdrowej rady smakować nie mogą, ale jako świeże, a jeszcze z łaski Bożej dobrze zdrowe a całe członki tej Rzeczypospolitej tak o niej radzili [...]". *Zrzodlopisma*, 193.

34 *Zrzodlopisma*, 192.

35 Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1, 455.

36 *Zrzodlopisma*, 192–93.

The fundamental difference between the Marshal and the Vice-Chancellor lies in how they view the King's relation towards the body politic. Whereas Leszczyński sees the King as a part of it, not independent from the other parts, Myszkowski depicts him as a physician, that is to say, as someone external to the sick body and acting upon it from the outside. The metaphor of Mother Republic is conjoined with the fatherly image of the King, not accidentally absent from the Marshal's greeting. Ultimately, political subjectivity belongs to the monarch (and, as one would rightly assume, his closest advisors), while the sick body is associated with his subjects and presented as an object of surgery. This image of the monarch detached from the body politic and superior to it does not only correspond to the mentality of the old senatorial elites, but also expresses a trend towards absolutism, bitterly opposed and feared by the vast majority of the nobles.³⁷ However, such developments, occurring all over the continent, were structurally beneficial for the court officials like Myszkowski himself, strongly reinforcing power and size of the administrative corpus.

Medical imagery appeared in other speeches, too; for instance Mikołaj Sienicki, Marshal at the Sejm of Warsaw, stated that discord among the assembly could lead to "a bad sequela".³⁸ The concept of sick body politic may have already been a commonplace, or on its way to becoming one. At the very least, the passion and solemnity with which it was invoked proves that, having originated in the humanist literature, it began to correspond to the contemporary affairs to which the nobles were existentially committed. We see various political actors trying to endow it with a certain meaning and use it against each other. In the midst of these heated debates, the metaphor of the sick body politic passes from the sphere of literary concepts and enters the ongoing rhetorical contest which mirrors escalating societal conflict—and, as we will soon see, immediately returns to literature, charged with passionate affects which shook the memorable Sejms of the 1560s, and matures into a powerful symbol of lasting influence.

Republic Sick and Sane

Perhaps the earliest example of the interplay between these ongoing political affairs and the literary tradition is an anonymous dialogue most likely written during the first weeks of the Sejm of Piotrków, sometime at the turn of the year 1562/63: *Spisanie krótkie jako Rzeczpospolita polska lamentuje* [A Brief Writ of the Polish Republic's Lamentation]. It features personifications of the Republic, Religion, Justice, Defence,

37 Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Queen Liberty*, 67–84.

38 *Zrzodlopisma*, 191. The metaphor of a bad sequela occurs numerously: *Zrzodlopisma*, 45, 73, 115, 131, 146, 215, 245, 263, 402.

Execution, Fortune and Wisdom, as well as the Governor (*Gubernator*). In line with the tradition, the Republic is depicted as the mother abandoned by her ungrateful offspring. However, the introduction of the Execution and the Governor marks a significant novelty, an actualization aimed to mirror the parliamentary debates. Notably, it is not the Republic who succumbs to sickness, but the Execution, while the Governor appears after a long absence and is presented as somebody who acts on behalf of the Republic and helps to heal her sick maiden.³⁹ His sudden appearance resembles the famous return of Sigismund Augustus to the Crown of Poland after three-years long sojourn in Lithuania; the application of the term *gubernator* marks author's fidelity to the ancient tradition, abundant in the metaphor of the helmsman of the republic.⁴⁰ It can be also read as equivalent to the terms used in the juridical tradition, such as *tutor*, *conservator* and *administrator*, meaning that the King does not personally own the Crown lands, but acts as the leader of the political community and the protector of the realm.

Stanisław Bodniak attributed the dialogue to Jan Dymitr Solikowski,⁴¹ a young official and Catholic priest, who was a secretary to Primate Jakub Uchański and later, since 1564, to King Sigismund Augustus. Solikowski, who originated from middle nobility, was educated in Cracow and Wittenberg. His father, supposedly a Protestant, recommended him to Philip Melanchthon, under whom the future secretary was likely to study in 1559–60.⁴² In his later life, Solikowski made a remarkable career as an official, diplomat and writer. He was active in the Baltic politics and helped negotiate the treaty of Stettin in 1570 which ended the First Northern War. Collaborating with the French envoy in Poland, Jean de Monluc, he supported the bid of Henri de Valois for the Crown during the 1573 election and produced numerous pamphlets (Jan Czubek counts 19).⁴³ Since 1583 he held the dignity of the Archbishop of Lviv, the second most important in the Kingdom of Poland, and worked towards the Union of Brest in 1596, which resulted in the foundation of the Ruthenian Uniate Church.

Solikowski was known as a prolific political author. His most successful work, which is perhaps the nexus of the literary tradition I am reconstructing, is from the same period; its full title reads *Facies perturbatae et afflictatae Rei Publicae eiusque restaurandae ratio per visionem in Pathmo insula revelata* [A Countenance of Disturbed and Afflicted Republic, and An Account of Her Restoration, Revealed in a Vision at the Island of Pathmos].⁴⁴

39 Bodniak, ed., *Dwa pisma polityczne*, 25, 29–30.

40 Brock, *Greek Political Imagery*, 53–68.

41 Bodniak, ed., *Dwa pisma polityczne*, 9–12.

42 Wotschke, *Zum Briefwechsel Melanchthons mit Polen*, 353.

43 Czubek, “Wstęp,” in: *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, XXIV–XXXIV.

44 See forthcoming scholarly edition and book-length interpretive essay: Solikowski, *Facies*; Wolak, *Idea rzeczypospolitej*.

Facies, a work of considerable influence, consists of 20 chapters written in prose, preceded with a short 10-verse poem and a dedication to the King Sigismund Augustus. It was not published before 1626, that is, 23 years after the author's death, and it was mostly known as *Stanisłai Orechovii Apocalypsis*—falsely attributed to Stanisław Orzechowski (1513–1566), the most famous orator and political writer of the mid-sixteenth century.⁴⁵ New editions, translations and paraphrases were published consequently until the final partition of Poland, many of them connected to important political events, such as the 1587–88 War of the Polish Succession, the Confederation of Bar (1768–72) or the Great Sejm of 1788–92, which passed the Constitution of 3 May 1791.⁴⁶

The narrator of *Facies* is a sailor who, having accidentally landed at the Aegean island of Pathmos, arrives at an encampment filled with symbolical edifices such as *Domus Rei Publicae*, *Domus Iustitiae*, *Domus Consilii* or *Domus Rei Privatae*. The encampment is inhabited by personifications of political actors, such as *Res Publica*, *Rex*, *Episcopi*, *Senatores* or of virtues and concepts such as *Voluntas*, *Sensus Ruinae*, *Iustitia* or even *Usus Bonus Divini Nominis*. The main protagonist, the Republic, is found afflicted and abandoned by the infidelous sons, who turn to *Res Privata*, her rival and usurper. The story focuses on the restoration of *Respublica* and the defeat of *Res Privata*. Similarly as in Solikowski's earlier work, *Spisanie*, the King acts as the saviour of the Republic. He listens to passionate orations, delivered by his magistrates: *Sensus Ruinae*, *Voluntas* and *Consilium*. Then, upon hearing a bitter prophecy uttered by *Timor Dei* and ending with quotes from the vision of Isaiah, the King rushes to help the sick Republic, who is cured on his order by a medician named *Caritas*. An ultimate battle between virtues and vices occurs; the victory of the virtues is followed by a symbolical fulfilment of some of the postulates of the executionist movement—restoration of the royal domain and union with unspecified neighbouring countries—and final triumph.

Solikowski's allegory features important traits of the tradition of laments. The Republic proffers her complaint in Chapter V, stressing the physical aspects of maternity. "I have come to see my sons", she says, "whom I have delivered and nourished, and led forth to highest dignities [...]. But where are they? Why does nobody come to greet me, no one salutes the mother?"⁴⁷ Earlier, in Chapter IV, she is encouraged by her maids, Religion and Justice, to approach the House of Senators exhibit "her motherly bosom, from whence" the sons "draw their life", as well as "breasts, by which they have been nourished" and "hands and elbows which carried them".⁴⁸

45 For the reasons of this attribution see Wolak, *Apokryficzna apokalipsa Rzeczypospolitej*.

46 Wolak, *Wprowadzenie do lektury*, in: Solikowski, *Facies*.

47 Solikowski, *Facies*, V, 1, 2. "filios – inquit – venio, quos ideo peperit, ideo nutriti, et ad summa fastigia dignitatem evexi [...]. Nemo matrem salutatur?". Trans. J. W.

48 Solikowski, *Facies*, IV, 3, 2: "[...] maternum sinum ex quo vitam hauserunt; ostendes ubera

The depictions of Religion and Republic are clearly influenced by Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*, where, for instance, Philosophy, who addresses the narrator, mentions her maternal breastfeeding: "Art thou that man, who, erstwhile fed with the milk and reared upon the nourishment which is mine to give, had grown up to the full vigour of a manly spirit? [...] Dost thou know me?"⁴⁹ When introducing the wretched Religion, Solikowski uses direct quotes from Boethius.⁵⁰ The lines from *De consolatione* recur further on, in the climactic finale of Chapter XIV, the scene of the healing. The vessel, which contains the medicine—Solikowski terms it *pyxis*, perhaps to evoke associations with the eucharistic receptacle, named *pyx*—features the following inscription:

"Ye are blest, ye sons of men,
If the love that rules the sky
In your hearts is throned on high!"⁵¹

These are the closing verses of the Book II of *De Consolatione*. They sum up a description of cosmic love, which presides over the mighty forces of nature. The Boethian account of *amor quo caelum regitur* is an important testimony to the Neoplatonic origin of his philosophy; Cornelia de Vogel traced its roots in Proclus's commentary to Plato's *Alcibiades* and in Pseudo-Dionysius's *On the Divine Names*.⁵² The verses inscribed on the vessel define the relation between nature and the sphere of human affairs: men's happiness is attained by the means of imitating the cosmic love. Solikowski's choice indicates a clear message: the Republic is to be cured by a return to the ancient idea of an analogy between politics and ethics—which remain inseparable—and cosmology. The classic expressions of this analogy are found in Plato's *Statesman* and Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*.⁵³

Another inspiration of *Facies*—much stronger than the Boethian one—comes from the *Tablet*, a Greek philosophical dialogue traditionally attributed to Cebes of Thebes, a disciple of Socrates, but actually written in the first or second century CE.⁵⁴ The *Tablet*, available in a printed Latin translation since 1497,⁵⁵ enjoyed huge popularity in the European Renaissance, influencing literature and, by virtue

quibus enutriti sunt; ostendes manus et ulnas quibus gestati [...] sunt".

49 Boethius, *The Consolation*, I, p2, 3–7: "»Tunc ille es«, ait, »qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis in virilis animi robur euaseras? [...] Agnoscisne me?«."

50 *Facies*, II, 2, 1 = Boethius, *The Consolation*, I, p1, 3–5.

51 *Facies*, XIV, 3, 2 = Boethius, *The Consolation*, II, 16, 28–30: "O felix hominum genus, / si vestros animos amor, / quo coelum regitur, regat."

52 De Vogel, *Amor quo caelum regitur*.

53 Plato, *Statesman*, 268d–275c; Cicero, *De republica*, VI. 13 (4).

54 Hirsch-Luipold, ed., *Die Bildtafel des Kebes*.

55 *Cebetis Thebani Tabula e Graeco in Latinum conversa per Ludovicum Odaxium Patavinum*.

of being an ekphrasis, visual arts. Solikowski most likely read it during his spell at the Academy of Cracow, when it was a part of the curriculum in the fall of 1557.⁵⁶

The subject of the Greek dialogue is an eponymous tablet found in the temple of Kronos; the main speaker, an old sage, presents an exegesis of the artifact to his public. The tablet depicts a circle of walls surrounding a hill and populated by numerous personifications of virtues and vices; the exegesis turns into a figurative journey through Life—for, as we are assured, “this place is called Life.”⁵⁷ The most important similarities between the *Tablet* and Solikowski’s *Facies* include ethical dualism, personifications, symbolical edifices, and the motif of intoxication and healing, as well as some textual similes, most vivid in the depiction of the place in which the camp is located. The sailor sees it in a dubious light (*dubia luce*), beside a grove (*per nemusculum*),⁵⁸ which resembles the description of the Abode of the Blessed at the top of Life from the *Tablet*. The Abode of the Blessed stands “in front of a meadow” (*ante illud nemus locum quendam*), and is “illuminated with a great lightness” (*multo lumine illustratur*),⁵⁹ mirroring the depiction of the afterworldly meadow from the Platonic myth of Er.⁶⁰

The ethical dualism—which Solikowski equals with the political one—is most vividly marked by the motif of two rivalling personifications. The ultimate aim of figurative journey through Life, undertaken by the exegete of the tablet, is to meet Happiness, residing at the very top, and attain salvation; this depends on the recognition of true Paideia (*Educatio*), which is to be discerned from the false one (*Falsa Educatio*, *Ψευδοπαιδεία*). Similarly, the ethical standing of the personae depicted in the *Facies* depends on whether they can correctly discern *Res Publica* from the impostrous *Res Privata*. The Solicovian Republic is aided by two maids, Religion and Justice; just as Paideia, which forms a trio with ‘junior’ personifications of Truth (*Ἀληθεία*) and Persuasion (*Πειθώ*).⁶¹

The ascent towards Happiness is possible only after a purification, a catharsis; for the multitude of those who enter Life first drink a portion of error and ignorance, handed out by Deceit, and the few who later liberate themselves owe it to a remedy accepted from the True Paideia.⁶² Both images recur in Solikowski’s *Facies*, although

56 Kiliańczyk-Zięba, *Wstęp*, 30.

57 *Tablet*, 4, 2.

58 Solikowski, *Facies*, I, 1, 1.

59 *Tablet*, 17, 2: “ [...] ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ ἄλλους [...] φωτὶ πολλῶ καταλαμπόμενος [...] ἐν μέσῳ τῶ λειμῶνι [...]”

60 Plato, *Republic*, X, 614e–616b. Hirsch-Luipold, ed., *Die Bildtafel des Kebes*, 131, n. 78.

61 *Tablet*, 17, 118, 2.

62 *Tablet*, 5, 1–6, 1; 14, 3–4

slightly distorted. First, a disorderly multitude accepts venom from the hands of a woman named Rhamnusia,⁶³ and later the sick Republic is healed by Love.

Facies features numerous allusions to contemporary politics and parliamentary discourse in particular, which was noted already in the 1933 monograph by Kazimierz Kosiński.⁶⁴ Solikowski wrote his allegory in the summer of 1564 at the Sejm of Parczew, having recently been accepted to the Royal Chancellery, and offered it to the King on his 40th birthday, the 1 August.⁶⁵ Although the allegory is devoid of proper names of Poland, Lithuania and political actors, it does include the names of neighbouring powers, presented in the first chapter as surrounding and menacing the encampment.⁶⁶ A similar motif appears in the speech of Vice-Chancellor Myszkowski from the 22 November 1563.⁶⁷ Solemn orations delivered by *Sensus Ruinae*, *Voluntas*, *Consilium* and *Timor Dei* are full of prophesies of ruin and admonishments known from parliamentary speeches. Furthermore, *Consilium* puts forward some general proposals of policies in form of a list of rules to be followed by the monarch—perhaps an early prefiguration of *pacta conventa* sworn by each King since the first free election in 1573—and tries to address pressing concerns, such as conduct during the expected interregnum after the demise of the last Jagiellon.⁶⁸

Solikowski also includes a discreet self-reference. Upon listening to the oration by *Sensus Ruinae*, which opens a series of speeches by the magistrates, the King benignly raises his right hand and admits the speaker into the court officials (*inter alios curiae suae praefectos adscivit*).⁶⁹ Significantly, the following orators are described as *Voluntas gubernator Regni* and *Consilium vicegubernator Regni*. Since no office named *gubernator* existed by the time in the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland, these terms most likely hint at the chancellor and the vice-chancellor. The series of speeches result in the King rushing to help the wretched Republic and are followed by the climactic scene of the healing. This plot composition means that the author promotes Royal Chancellery as the main actor driving the King to fulfill his duties and act for the benefit of the public good.

The original manuscripts include five drawings executed by Solikowski's hand. Some of them are available in a second version, possibly redrawn by a professional illustrator.⁷⁰ *Aegra Res Publica*, *Remedia Curandae Rei Publicae*, *Sana Res Publica*,

63 Solikowski, *Facies*, VII, 1, 1.

64 Kosiński, *Jana Dymitra Solikowskiego*, 61–97.

65 Solikowski, Preface to *Facies*, 7, 2.

66 Solikowski, *Facies*, I, 2.

67 *Zrzodlopisma*, 195–97.

68 Solikowski, *Facies*, X, 2–3.

69 Solikowski, *Facies*, IX, 3, 1.

70 BG PAN, ms. 1508, 2r–3r; BG PAN, ms. 1509 (Solikowski's autograph), 2r–3r, 40v–40r; Solikowski, *Facies*, Ilustracje, 3, 1–8; Wolak, *Apokryficzna apokalipsa Rzeczypospolitej*, 46–47, n. 25.

Inversa Respublica and *Mons Rerum et Actionum*. The drawings are rich in inscriptions, mostly names of offices or lists of virtues and vices, and can be viewed as an emblematical summary of the contents of *Facies*. Three of them feature the first figurative depiction of the Republic in Polish humanist culture, perhaps influenced by the depiction of Polonia from the frontispiece of Stanisław Orzechowski's *Quincunx*, published a few months before Solikowski wrote *Facies*.⁷¹

I will devote some attention to the first three drawings, which represent the process of recovery. The Sick Republic has a rope tied around her neck; the rope is held by a hand inscribed *Res privata*. A chalice falls out of her right hand, *Violata Religio*, and in her left hand she holds a shattered sword, *Enervata Iustitia*. A list of vices unfolds under each hand, *Fructus Violatae Religionis* on one side and *Fructus Enervatae Iustitiae* on the other. Most notably, an inscription placed upon her chest reads *Seditio mors Rei Publicae*, reminding of the tendency towards describing the societal conflict in the vocabulary of classical Roman historiography. However, Solikowski, in contrast to many of his compatriots, definitely does not see *seditio*—or, to phrase it in contemporary terms, *rokosz*—as a guarantee of freedom.⁷² It is rather a hatchery of licence, which is evident from the inscription on the Sick Republics' bosom: *Licentia* (Figure 1).

The Remedies are represented in the allegorical form of a vessel or box, alluding to the *pyx* from Chapter XIV. The vessel is filled with a list of virtues or traits of political bodies, such as King or Senate. It is crowned by *Sensus Ruinae, quae proxima est*, a sense of imminent ruin; followed by *Expergefatio ex somno diuturno*, awakening from a deep sleep, owed to *Timor Dei*, *Sana Mens*, *Resipiscentia* and *Constantia*, and followed by *Caritas*, all of which, together with *Sensus Ruinae*, appear in the text as personifications. The verses below the vessel describe it as containing *medicina laboranti parata*, a medicine prepared by the one who strived to produce it, or *pharmaca mortifero [...] morbo*, drugs against deadly illness (Figure 2).⁷³

The depiction of the Sane Republic mirrors the first illustration. She holds the chalice and the sword firmly, with a list of virtues under each hand: *Fructus Integrae Religionis* and *Fructus Restitutae Iustitiae*. The young magistrate did not hesitate to inscribe *Reverentia Magistratum* above her head and *Custodia Propriae Vocationis* beside it. Love resides in her chest—*Charitas vita [sic] Reipublicae*—echoing the climactic scene of the healing from the Chapter XIV (Figure 3).

The illustrations were particularly important for the early reception of *Facies*, as we may infer from the watercolour painting *Mons Rei Publicae Poloniae*, dated on

71 Górska, *Polonia – Respublica – Patria*, 195–208; Pfeiffer, *Caelum et regnum*, 88–111; Piech, *Obraz Królestwa Polskiego*, 247–68.

72 For such opinion see e.g. Czubek, ed. *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*, 421.

73 The first version appears in BG PAN, ms. 1509, 3v; the second in BG PAN, ms. 1508, 3v.

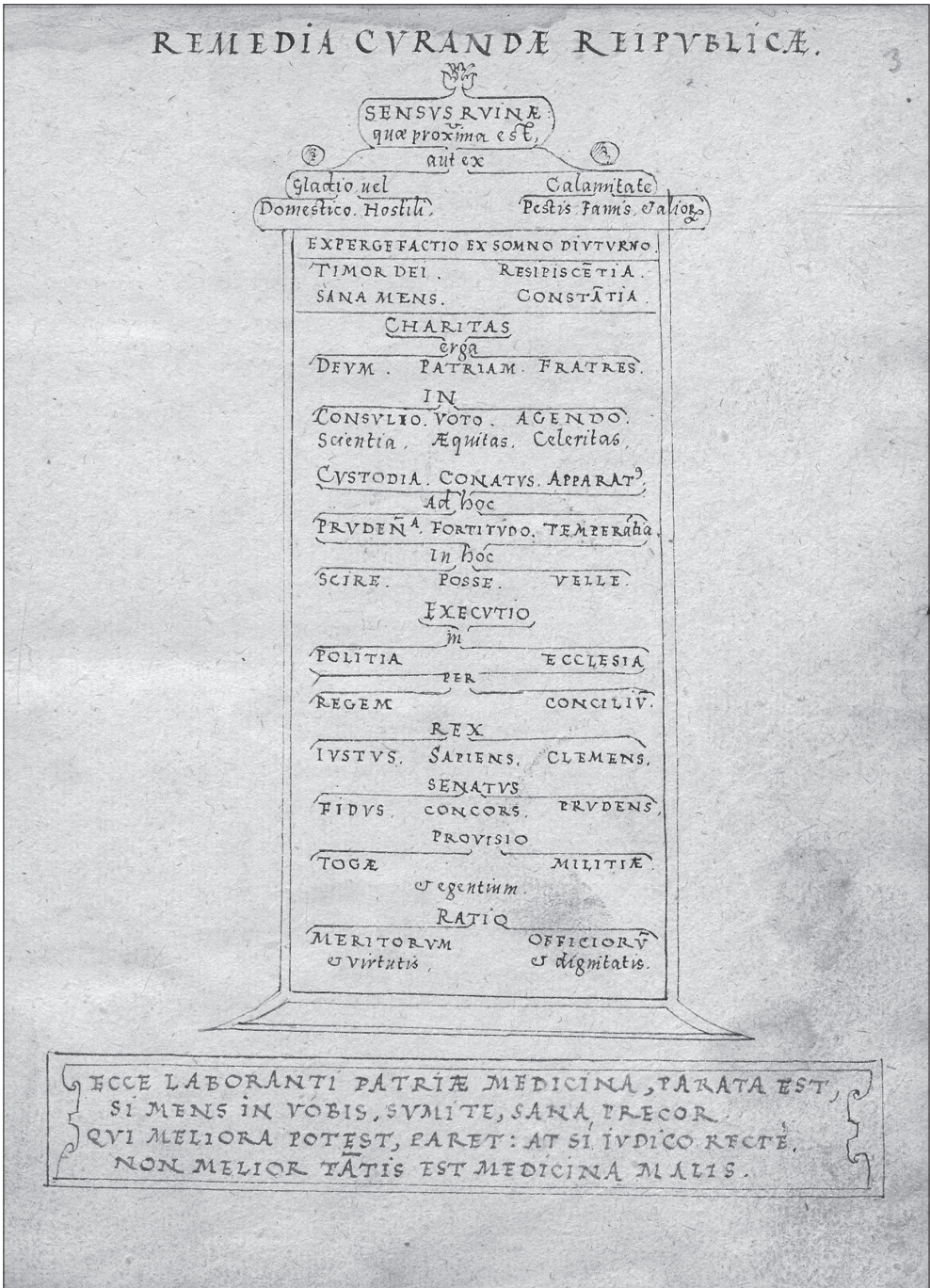


Figure 2 Solikowski, *Remedia Curandae Rei Publicae* [Remedies for the Republic, Who Awaits Healing]. PAN BG. Ms. 1509, 3r



Figure 3 Solikowski, *Sana Res Publica* [Sane Republic]. PAN BG. Ms. 1509, 3v

26 December 1578.⁷⁴ It is an adaptation of Solikowski's *Mons Rerum et Actionum*; both illustrations present the King standing on the hilltop and trying to prevent a car of *res nostrae ruentes* from falling into the mouth of infernal monster, which resemble the apocalyptic motif of hellmouth or *bocca del'inferno*. The King is depicted as *kat-echon*;⁷⁵ on the original drawing his face resembled Sigismund Augustus, while on the watercolour it is clearly Stephen Báthory. Notably, the King stands before a fortress on the hilltop, the name of which read *Arx Foelicitatis*, which is definitely influenced by the Abode of the Blessed from the *Tablet* of Cebes and its numerous representations, such as the frontispiece to Erasmus's *Novum Testamentum omne* from 1522.⁷⁶

Some of Solikowski's readers, editors and paraphrasts were particularly interested in medical imagery. An early verse paraphrase of the first ten chapters, *Wizerunk utrapionej Rzeczy Pospolitej, Countenance of the Afflicted Republic*, was written after the 1587–88 War of the Polish Succession, and printed in 1612. It includes allusions to the decisive Battle of Byczyna and glorifies the victorious Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, depicted as “the highest Senator”.⁷⁷ A few remakes of this paraphrase are extant in manuscripts and old prints,⁷⁸ while Hieronim Bozdarzowski, a printer who published *Wizerunk* in 1629, decided to change some of the proper names, in allusion to the series of wars with the Swedes in the early seventeenth century.⁷⁹ The first editor of this paraphrase, the famed rebel Jan Szczęśny Herburt, have supplanted it with *Lekarstwo na uzdrowienie Rzeczy Pospolitej, Medicine for the Healing of Republic*, a list found in one of the aforementioned manuscripts under the name of *Receptae [sic] 15 pro servanda Re Publica*.⁸⁰ The list from the manuscript is identical with the fifteen rules for the King proposed by *Consilium* in his speech from Chapter X of *Facies*. Herburt's edition features its Polish translation and adds anatomical headings. For instance, a precept, according to which the King should “have a good Council at home and mighty defence on his borders” is described as [a medicine] “For Breasts”;⁸¹ “prize the meritorous, punish the envious and do justice to the afflicted” — “For Hands”;⁸² “always keep equal mind in all actions” —

74 “Mons Reipublicae Polonae”, accessed 21 September 2024, <https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/zbiory/922603> (MNW, Rys. Pol. 4269).

75 2 Thessalonians, 2:7–8.

76 *Die Bildtafel des Cebes*, 226; UB Basel / *Novum Testamentum omne*, accessed 19 September 2024, https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/ch16/content/titleinfo/1240590

77 *Wizerunk*, 527ff, in: Solikowski, *Facies*.

78 BDzik, P. III, ms. 7, 311ff.; BKras, ms. 254, 190ff. (both lost); BO, ms. 190, 22–27. For an old edition based on these manuscripts see: Czubek, ed., *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu*, 238–55.

79 *Wizerunk*, 44–48, 394, 448, 493, 532, 567, 570, 582, in: Solikowski, *Facies*.

80 BO, ms. 190, 27; BUW, f. 713.2493, 20–22 = *Lekarstwo*, in: *Wizerunk*.

81 *Lekarstwo*, 2: “Na piersi [...]. Doma dobrą Radę mieć, a na granicach potężną obronę [...].”

82 *Lekarstwo*, 3: “Na ręce [...]. Zasłużonym nagradzać, a występne karać, utrapionym sprawiedliwość czynić.”

“For Heart”;⁸³ “incessantly guard the officials and the great lords, so that they do not oppress the poor”—“For Ears”.⁸⁴ Most interestingly, the list ends with a mention of an organ which may be quite surprising: “For Spleen: conquer thine own desires, which is a conquest more splendid than conquering lands of the greatest foe”.⁸⁵ The mention of spleen, unnoticed in the earlier laments, is of great interest due to its particular position in the history of medical knowledge. It reemerges in a much later text, which I will examine as an interesting summary of the investigated tradition.

Subsilvania Spleen

The 1560s mark a direct correspondence between the literary representations of the body politic and contemporary discourse, a tendency reinforced during the first interregnum of 1572–73⁸⁶ and the Zebrzydowski rebellion of 1606–07.⁸⁷ Lamentations of the Republic or other figures, such as Religion, Freedom, Poland or Motherland, become numerous, conventional and, as they follow established formal patterns, less inventive. One of the most distinguished works of that genre written in the seventeenth century is *Lament utrapionej Matki Korony Polskiej, Lament of the Afflicted Mother Crowne of Poland*, authored by Szymon Starowolski and published c. 1655. It features the motif of epitaph (proclaimed by the yet living Republic) and extensive quotes from the vision of Isaiah.⁸⁸ Despite its aesthetic values, Starowolski’s text is hardly innovative and it is clear that the aforementioned topics originate in the earlier tradition. However, the seventeenth century lamentations were not devoid of novelties. Dariusz Cezary Maleszyński pointed at a particularly exceptional poem by rather unknown provincial author, Stanisław Samuel Szemiot, a petty nobleman of Samogitian origin who wrote most of his works between 1674 and 1684 at the modest hereditary estate of his wife in Przegaliny, in the voivodship of Podlachia or—as the humanists would have it—Subsilvania.⁸⁹

Szemiot did not publish his poems and they remained largely unknown; it was only in the 1970s and 1980s when Mirosław Korolko prepared the first scholarly editions. The Subsilvanian poet was remarkably well read and admired Jan

83 *Lekarstwo*, 6: “Na serce [...]. Jednakiego umysłu zawždy we wszystkim być.”

84 *Lekarstwo*, 7: “Na oczy [...]. Dogłądać ustawicznie, aby urzędnicy i wielcy panowie uboższych nie uciskali.”

85 *Lekarstwo*, 14: “Na śledzionę [...]. Chciwości swoje zwyciężyć, które zwycięstwo nad sobą jest sławniejsze, niż nad nawiętszym nieprzyjacielem.”

86 Czubek, ed., *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia*.

87 Czubek, ed., *Pisma polityczne z czasów rokoszu*.

88 Starowolski, *Lament*.

89 Maleszyński, *Corpus politicum*, 40–42.

Kochanowski in the times when the readership of the Czarnolas bard already started to wane.⁹⁰ His education is attested in a work of peculiar interest, a poignant image titled *The Polish Crowne is a Corpse, as Proved with Certain Sentences*, which begins with the following verses:

“Not only in our lands those who pass away are grieved
And people miserable parlors hold,
For that was the custom of the very pagans,
In Lydia, in Crete, and among the Romans.

Heavy grief always ripped their insides
and their poor bones withered from misery,
and if, beholding the dead bodies,
they could not weep, they must hire weepers.

Yet I don't know what comes upon us now,
as we become possessed by something inhumane.
The Mother passed away—to our laughs.
The body lies on bier—to our jests.

No wonder that we by no mean believe
the truth, and when pronounced, we courtly dismiss it.
Yet jesting is in vain, since—behold—
once living Crowne of Poland is a corpse.

As we certainly know, the body
is joined by various veins and members
all of whom I shall omit, apart from one,
the spleen, for it doth wield a mighty influence.

Since whenever it takes up too much moisture
and keepeth not the measure of the humours,
it quickly bloats, and thence heart feints,
and all the members and whole body quivers.

What are the mighty lords, if not the spleens
which try to lead the body through disparate paths?
Just let them bloat with luxury, and soon
the motherland will die, and so her members.”⁹¹

90 Korolko, “Stanisław Samuel Szemiot,” in: Szemiot, *Sumariusz*, 14; Szemiot, *O swych wierszach* (*Sumariusz*, 2), 12–16.

91 Szemiot, *Polska Korona* (= *Sumariusz*, III, 11), 1–28: “Nie tylko u nas umarłych żałują, / Nie tylko smutne pompy wystawują; / Toż bowiem było u samych poganów / W Lidyjej, w Krecie, / Toż i u Rzymianów. /// Zawsze żal ciężki pruć ludzkie wnętrzości, / Zawsze i smutek suszył

This is perhaps the most touching and grim of the quoted texts, emerging from the times when the might of the Polish–Lithuanian Republic was already fading, demolished by rebellions and wars: Khmelnytsky Uprising (1648–57), Russo-Polish War of 1654–67, Second Northern War (1655–60) and the *rokosz* of Jerzy Lubomirski (1665–66).⁹² The crisis of the seventeenth century loomed large, and the society of Poland-Lithuania remained disinterested in developing early modern territorial state with an administrative apparatus, characteristic of the Westphalian system.⁹³

Naturally, Szemiot invokes the ancient tradition and laments the infidelity of the sons, “possessed by something inhumanane”. Just as in Rej’s poems or Solikowski’s *Facies*, ethical vice and infidelity to the embodied community is inextricably connected with an inability to recognize the grim truth. Most interestingly, Szemiot devotes considerable attention to the mortal illness of the Republic, diagnosing it more precisely than Krzycki, Solikowski or any of the discussed authors.

The Subsylvanian poet focuses on the spleen which, according to the Hippocratic tradition, was the central organ of humoral economy. It regulated the flow of the black bile, the most important of humours,⁹⁴ and kept the fluids of the body in harmony with each other. Black bile was linked to a certain “complexion”, oft seen as characteristic of an old age and weakness; Szemiot himself, in another poem, associates it with traits such as “cold”, “dry”, “ugly”, “small”, “fat”, “pale”, “black”, “wicked” and “quarrelsome”.⁹⁵ Such features seem well suited for developing a moralizing use of the medical imagery.

Bloating of the spleen could have been interpreted as weakening the heart since both organs are located on the left side of the body, the warm heart reportedly balancing

biedne kości, / Kiedy na ciało umarłych patrzali, / Jeśli nie mogli płakać, najmowali. /// A teraz nie wiem, co się z nami stało, / Gdy niehumanne coś opanowało. / Skonała Matka – a my się śmiejemy, / Na marach ciało – my zaś żartujemy. /// Nie dziw, że żadną miarą nie wierzymy, / Gdy prawdę mówią, dworstwem ich zbywamy; / Lecz próżne żarty, już się jawnie stało: / Z żywej Korony Polskiej – martwe ciało. /// Wiemy dowodnie, że ciało spojone / Z żył i z rozlicznych członków uczynione; / Omijam wszystkie, jednej się nie godzi / Śledziona, mówię, ta siła dowodzi. /// Bo skoro zbytnich wilgoci nabierze / I dla humorów nie zostanie w mierze / Wnet się nadyma, a stąd serce mdleje / I członki wszystkie i ciało truchleje /// Cóż są panowie, jeśli nie śledziona, / Które kierują ciałem w różne strony? / Niechaj się tylko nadmą bogactwami, / Ojczyzna musi umierać z członkami.”

92 See e.g. Frost, *After the Deluge*.

93 This was noted as early as in 1841 by Mickiewicz in *Les slaves*, II, (XLI), 282–86. See also Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Queen Liberty*, 9–22, 25–37.

94 On the humoral theory and its reception see e.g. Jouanna, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, 335–60.

95 Szemiot, *Cztery kompleksy ludzkie* (= *Sumariusz*, II, 23), 33–36; Maleszyński, *Corpus politicum*, 40–41.

the cold of the spleen.⁹⁶ Galen, invoking the authority of Hippocrates and Plato, wrote that malfunctioning, pussing spleen floods the body with bad humours and leads to terminal state.⁹⁷ Pathological consequences include dropsy; hence we may speak of an evident continuity from Krzycki to Szemiot.⁹⁸ The famed humanist did not provide us with too extensive an etiology of the Republic's mortal disease in his 1522 epitaph. Luckily, the provincial nobleman Szemiot came to his aid over 150 years later, excelling in the creative literary use of Hippocratean concepts. Perhaps, as one may infer from the mood of his poems, Szemiot himself succumbed to melancholy.

Apart from regulating humours, spleen was also identified by Galen as an important digestive organ,⁹⁹ and almost a millenium later Avicenna held that the spleen, as well as the gallbladder, served as a residue of the indigestible remnants of food.¹⁰⁰ It is no accident that Szemiot identifies “mighty lords”, the richest of the estate, with spleens, and accuses them of “bloating with luxury”, which results in terminal illness of the political body. They are unable to digest the wealth which they devour. Notably, it was possible to denote both gluttony and avarice by a single Middle Polish word, *łakomstwo*.¹⁰¹ The author of the anatomical headings added to the Polish translation of *Receptae [sic] 15 pro servanda Re Publica*, which I discussed previously, also connected spleen with dangerous passions and rendered *cupiditas* as *chciwość*, avarice, in accordance with the verse paraphrase.¹⁰² Szemiot perspicaciously used this tradition to point at a fundamental cause of the derangement of the body politic: the economic inequality among the *de iure* equal noble estate, which led to pathologies such as uncontrollable clientelism, corruption and vote buying. By the mid-sixteenth century societal conflict lost its impetus, thwarted by the burgeoning expansion of huge estates of the magnates.¹⁰³ Szemiot remained exceptional in showing clear awareness of its disastrous influence, which was not acknowledged and countered by the estate *en masse* as late as until the popular rebellion of Bar, launched in 1768.¹⁰⁴ The Subsylvanian poet, foretelling the demise of the noble Republic, ends his lament with sorrowful farewell:

96 Maleszyński, *Corpus politicum*, 41.

97 Galen, *De naturalis facultatibus*, II, 9 (133, 2–6).

98 Galen, *De naturalis facultatibus*, II, 8 (109, 5–110, 12).

99 Galen, *De naturalis facultatibus*, III, 9 (177, 16–178, 7).

100 Mayer and Goehl, *Die Grundzüge der Medizintheorie Avicennas*, 42–73.

101 Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku – łakomstwo, accessed 19 September 2024, <https://spxvi.edu.pl/indeks/haslo/62679>.

102 Compare *Facies*, X, 2,15. “*Cupiditates suas et seipsum vincere*”; Słownik polszczyzny XVI wieku – chciwość, accessed 19 September 2024, <https://spxvi.edu.pl/indeks/haslo/45745>.

103 Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System*, 112–59.

104 Skrzypek, *Rousseau et Wielhorski*, 232–42; Maciejewski, *Literatura barska (1767–1772)*, 80–81, 84–89.

“The lords are not restrained by any laws,
 These are the lords who hold laws in restrain.
 And you, the modest sons of Motherland, what shall you do?
 Unguarded, shall you perish, too?

I bid you final *vale*, o sweet Motherland,
 as you are covered by the floods of death.
 And we, the modest sons, are all in tears
 bewailing, while the lords rejoice.”¹⁰⁵

The Commendation of *Rzeczpospolita*

The corporeal metaphor is found in many further texts from early modern Poland, such as sermons or symbolic anatomies. The tradition of lamentations is distinctive firstly because it testifies a deep existential commitment on the part of the author or speaker; rooted in funeral songs, it is one of the oldest genres of literature, highly charged with affection. Quoted accounts testify that noble citizens saw the body politic as natural and corruptible, prone to sickness and death; moreover, they were convinced that their own fate is absolutely dependent on the welfare of the Republic, which is best evidenced by the ending of Szemiot’s poem.¹⁰⁶ Those who appeal to civic or republican values do not seem to differentiate between ‘private’ or family bodies and the body politic, which is understandable for a society in which civil rights were inseparable from military duties in terms of the Noble Host (*pospolite ruszenie*).¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the welfare of the body politic required each member to keep faith to his proper office, as evidenced by the inscription besides the head of the Sane Republic from Solikowski’s drawing; finally, it required Love, understood as an imitation of the cosmic Love, that is the order of nature.

The existential dependence of individuals on the body politic is best outlined in Aristotle’s *Politics*, a treaty which enjoyed considerable readership among the nobles and was translated into Old Polish as early as in 1605. According to the Stagirite,

105 Szemiot, *Polska Korona*, 49–56: “Nie prawo panom, lecz prawu panowie / Już rozkazują. A wy co, synowie / Ubożsi też Ojczyzny poczniecie, / Bez ostrożności z Ojczyzną umrzecie? /// Ostatnie ‘vale’ oddać ci przychodzi, / Wdzięczna Ojczyzno! Śmiertelne powodzi / Już cię zalały. Płaczem my, synowie / Ubożsi. Ale śmieją się panowie.”

106 On the identification of the estate with the body politic see Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *The Political Discourse*, 19–23; Backvis, *Les Thèmes majeurs*.

107 Also termed “levy-in-mass”, see Fedorowicz, Bogucka, Samsonowicz, eds., *A Glossary of Polish Terms*, XV.

“[...] the polis is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually. For the whole must necessarily be prior to the part; since when the whole body is destroyed, foot or hand will not exist except in an equivocal sense, like the sense in which one speaks of a hand sculptured in stone as a hand; because a hand in those circumstances will be a hand spoiled [...]. It is clear therefore that the polis is also prior by nature to the individual; for if each individual when separate is not self-sufficient, he must be related to the whole state as other parts are to their whole.”¹⁰⁸

The members of Rzeczpospolita kept faith in this ancient and medieval tradition even after it had been challenged by the proponents of the contract theory, according to whom the body politic was of artificial character, a strange man-made creature, while nature—to quote the most radical and profound of them—was but an “art whereby God hath made and governes the world”.¹⁰⁹ Early modern sovereign states rose at the cost of old estates, such as the noble estate of the Polish-Lithuanian *szlachta*, who, witnessing their own demise and disorientation, became “possessed by something inhumane”.

Noble republicanism was based on the belief in the unity of ethics and politics, inherited from classical thought. The noble citizens were political living beings in the proper sense, ζῷα πολιτικά,¹¹⁰ for their existence drew meaning from adherence to various political bodies, such as land, estate, voivodship, the Crown, the Republic and, finally, the Church, conceptualized as the mystical body of Christ and nourished by its presence in Eucharist.¹¹¹ One Aristotelian definition of man shall not be interpreted without reference to the other, ζῷον λόγον ἔχον.¹¹² Λόγος may be rendered as reasoning or speech, and perhaps most importantly, rational speech. Rational speech, an expression of one’s reasoning, requires an addressee, a community of dialogue, emerging from the polis, as in the dialogues of Plato;¹¹³ or, to invoke one of the finest Old Polish writers, the dialogues of Orzechowski.¹¹⁴

The authors whose works I have explored—Krzycki, Leszczyński, Solikowski and Szemiot—aim at proffering rational speech in the Aristotelian sense, but combined with the existential import of the tradition of lamentation, be it poetry or prose, humanist literature or parliamentary rhetorics. Their endeavour would be

108 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a18–23, 25–27. Trans. by Rackham, modified.

109 Hobbes, *The Introduction*, 1, in *Leviathan*.

110 Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1, 9, 1253a2–3.

111 Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 194–232. See also Backvis, *Individu et société*.

112 Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1, 10, 1253a9–10.

113 For ethical indispensability of political dialogue see e.g. Plato, *Gorgias*, 486d2–7.

114 Orzechowski opens his most important dialogue with a direct allusion to Plato, *Phaedrus*, 227a1. See Orzechowski, *Quincunx*, 461.

meaningless if not for an engaged public, for other members of the yet-living body. It is by no means self-sufficient, an art for art's sake. The death of Republic, the disintegration of the *corpus politicum* and of all corporeal bodies rooted in the already bygone era of the Medieval imperils the very core of their literary activity. Menaced by the collapse of this world of meanings, a condition termed by Jonathan Lear 'cultural devastation',¹¹⁵ they resort to the primordial genre of lamentation, a farewell song to the passing world which helps preserve its meaning.

Abbreviations

BDzik – Biblioteka Tarnowskich w Dzikowie [Tarnowski Library, Dzików; defunct since 1945]

BKras – Biblioteka Ordynacji Krasińskich [Krasiński Library; defunct since 1944]

BO – Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich [Library of the Ossoliński National Institute]

BN – Biblioteka Narodowa [The National Library of Poland]

BUW – Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie [Warsaw University Library]

MNW – Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie [The National Museum in Warsaw]

PAN BG – Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska [Polish Academy of Sciences, The Gdańsk Library]

Rys. Pol. – Kolekcja Rysunku Polskiego [The Collection of Polish Drawing]

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115 Lear, *Radical Hope*, 1–52.

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