

SUMMARY

“Good blood”. Henryk Sienkiewicz between estate proto-racism of the nobility and class racism (the Trilogy and contemporary novels)

The book is devoted to the problem of the racialization of social divisions in six novels by Henryk Sienkiewicz. It is about the “historical” Trilogy: *With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge*, *Sir Wołodyjowski* and the so-called “contemporary trilogy”: *Without Dogma*, *The Połaniecki Family*, *Maelstroms*. In order to analyze the title issue, the author of the book uses in literary studies the critical approaches to the category of “race”, primarily research on proto-racism and class racism. Referring to Western theoreticians (including É. Balibar, E. Traverso, B. Isaac), Ryś argues that Polish culture was dominated by estate proto-racism of the nobility (the historiosophical and theological paradigm) until the first half of the nineteenth century, and from the second in the mid-nineteenth century, the domination of class racism (quasi-scientific paradigm). This division allows us to look at both Sienkiewicz’s historical novels and ask whether they affirm or undermine estate proto-racism of the nobility, as well as Sienkiewicz’s contemporary works to determine whether they contain ideas that fit in with class racism. At the same time, the author tries to outline a perspective that makes it possible to study the problem of racializing social divisions from old texts to newer and newest.

The work is divided into two parts. The first “introductory” is theoretical and analytical in nature and consists of seven chapters. The second, “the proper one”, is strictly analytical and has six chapters. Moreover, the book begins with a fragment entitled *Instead of an Introduction*, and ends with the text *Instead of an End: an Introduction to Further Research?*

At the beginning of the first part of the work (chapters I-II) the author defines the estate proto-racism of the nobility and distinguishes it from class racism, shows the implementation of the phenomenon on selected examples from Old Polish literature (including W. Nekanda Trepka, W. Potocki), proves that, contrary to popular belief, these ideas had little to do with the allegedly

Sarmatian genealogy of the Polish *nobilitatis*, emphasizes the overestimation of the role of the so-called sarmatism in Polish culture and presents an overview of the native variants of the theory of conquest, especially in its nineteenth-century version (F. H. Lewestam, K. Szajnocha, F. Piekosiński, L. Gumplowicz). Then, Ryś characterizes Sienkiewicz in the light of the previous considerations (chapter III), presenting his attitude to the estate proto-racism of the nobility and partly to the class racism (preliminary diagnosis), Old Polish literature (a hobby, and therefore also very good knowledge), Sarmatism (the influence is smaller than is usually believed), the theory of conquest (ambiguous position). The following chapters (IV-V) are devoted to the category of “race”, with particular emphasis on its importance in the nineteenth century and in the work of the author of *Mealstroms*, as well as the “racial-anthropological” criteria (cephalic index, facial angle, cranial volume) and Sienkiewicz’s rather favorable attitude towards them. Chapter VI, in turn, examines the semantic circles of the concept of class racism (especially in terms of Balibar and Traverso) and compares this term with other, related categories: dehumanization, racism of the intelligentsia (according to P. Bourdieu), cultural racism (according to J. M. Blaut), classism and “chamophobia” [Pol. *cham* ≈ boor]. The purpose of indicating the similarities and differences is to increase the conceptual precision. Chapter VII brings together a group of nineteenth-century theorists of class racism divided into several “lines”: the English (T. R. Malthus, H. Spencer, F. Galton); French (A. de Gobineau, H. Taine, G. Le Bon, G. Vacher de Lapouge) and – somewhat controversial – Polish (W. Olechnowicz, J. Talko-Hryniewicz, L. Rutkowski). The collection containing references to Sienkiewicz’s readings (e.g. Taine) and information about the writer’s private contacts (e.g. with Olechnowicz) was also enriched with an *appendix* devoted to class racism in the native anthropology of the inter-war period (e.g. J. Czekanowski, K. Stojanowski, L. Jaxa Bykowski), in which Sienkiewicz’s novels were sometimes quoted to illustrate the exclusive theories.

The second part of the work begins with a chapter (VIII) devoted to *With Fire and Sword*. It proves that although Sienkiewicz was not an eulogist of the estate proto-racism of the nobility, the manner in which he presents these images may raise justified doubts. While the signals undermining this discourse are generally discrete and delicate, the reconstructions are usually more distinct and dominate quantitatively. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the estate proto-racism of the nobility is sometimes broken down and sometimes reinforced by the nineteenth-century class racism. A different implementation of the discussed issue is found in *The Deluge*, which is devoted to Chapter IX. As the author of the book claims, Sienkiewicz in

the second part of the Trilogy quite consistently undermines the old-noble ideas, showing, for example, that “great blood” is not the source of all virtues, and the plebeians are often characterized by virtues (“bravery”, patriotism) inherent only in *nobilitatis*. Also in the third part of the Trilogy – analyzed in Chapter X – we deal with a deconstruction of noble state proto-racism, carried out by both credible heroes (e.g. the story of Mr. Muszalski) and an omniscient narrator (e.g. distance to the view of nobility created by God). At the same time, the fictional image of the plebeians (who are either “feral marauders” or “sophisticated” sadists like Sergeant Luśnia) seems to be influenced by 19th-century sociobiological thinking.

The latter is fully revealed in the “contemporary trilogy”. The considerations concerning it are initiated by chapter XI devoted to *Without Dogma*. As examples of the racialization of social divisions, Ryś especially points to pseudo-evolutionist ideas about psychophysical properties inherited within classes (“instincts”, predispositions, anatomical structure). However, the complex narrative situation does not allow to answer the question whether the class racism of L. Płoszowski (the main character and narrator of the novel) is also the writer’s class racism. Another contemporary novel by Sienkiewicz, *The Połaniecki Family*, analyzed in Chapter XII, turns out to be helpful in formulating conclusions on this subject. Looking at the judgments of credible heroes and the narrator, among others about good “noble instincts” or “plebeian blood”, which determines low (also morally) behavior, Ryś indicates the forms of weaving class and “race” analogous to those in *Without Dogma*. Moreover, the juxtaposition of *The Połaniecki Family* with earlier contemporary Sienkiewicz’s works (*The Two Roads* and *The Charcoal Sketches*) and private correspondence leads the author of the book to the conclusion that class racism is an element of social views of Sienkiewicz himself (at least from that period of his work). A certain change – especially in comparison with the *Połaniecki Family* – is brought by *Maelstroms*, the last contemporary novel by Sienkiewicz (and also one of his last in general), considered in chapter XIII of the work. It argues that the writer’s attitude to the issues discussed is marked by a specific dichotomy, which corresponds, as it were, to the two main threads of the novel: romance and revolution. While in the romance thread the division into “good” – noble and “bad” – peasant instincts, blood, “race” is undermined, in the revolutionary thread an important role is played by the dehumanization of socialists and masses, taking the form of class racism.

A look at Sienkiewicz’s six novels in the context of various forms of racialization of social divisions leads to the conclusion – formulated in the final fragment – that although the writer “only” reconstructed in his works

estate proto-racism of the nobility, at the same time manifestations of class racism are visible in them. In some novels, the two discourses intertwine, sometimes even within one sentence. In the case of each of them, Sienkiewicz shows a certain instability, sometimes noticeable within various works, sometimes within a given novel.