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THE POSTHUMOUS ADVENTURES OF THE WHEELWRIGHT FROM SMARZOWA, OR, JAKUB SZELA IN SECOND-DEGREE HISTORY

RYSZARD JAMKA, *PANÓW PIŁĄ. TRZY LEGENDY O JAKUBIE SZELI*

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It is currently rather banal to observe that for more than a decade a quite heated debate has been underway in Poland about the peasantry, its history, and heritage. This debate has taken place not only in the humanities and social sciences but also in culture in the broad sense, including in the media discourse, literature, theatre, film, music, and the visual arts. The subject has appeared in a large number of academic and popularising books, in novels, music records, theatre performances, documentaries, feature films, media debates, exhibitions, and other activities in the field of art. The popularisation and intensification of peasant issues has even prompted some observers to suggest that we are dealing with a so-called people's turn (in Polish *zwrot ludowy*) in the field of Polish culture (Chmielewska 2024; Ryś 2015; Stobiecki 2022). Such a turn is not surprising if we take into account that up to the middle of the twentieth century the peasantry was the most numerous social group in Poland and the one from which the majority of contemporary Polish society originates. The peasants were, however, politically, socially, economically, and culturally subordinated and marginalised, internally colonised, and even racialised. In retrospect, they were at most

cherished instrumentally for political reasons in certain historical periods (especially in the times of the Polish People's Republic). The memory work of reclaiming their history, experiences, and agency is therefore an important aspect of the above-mentioned people's turn.

Ryszard Jamka's book *Panów piłą. Trzy legendy o Jakubie Szeli* [Saw the Landowners to Pieces: Three Legends about Jakub Szela] is part of this memory work on the academic meta-level. The book is a meticulous analysis of how Jakub Szela and the anti-feudal Peasant Uprising of 1846 in Galicia, the Austrian part of partitioned Poland, appear in the collective memory of Poles and others. To put it more bluntly, this book is devoted to the war of memory that has been ongoing in Poland for over 170 years over Szela and the so-called Galician Slaughter (*rabacja galicyjska*).[1]

Szela, the alleged leader of the peasant rebellion, was a figure who aroused great controversy during his lifetime and stirred up emotions that by no means ceased after his death but on the contrary intensified, at least in some periods. We are again experiencing such a period because Szela has become, as it were, the patron of the aforementioned people's turn, thanks *inter alia* to the highly acclaimed play *W imię Jakuba S.* [In the Name of Jakub S.], written by Paweł S. Demirski and directed by Monika Strzępka. It premiered on 8 December 2011 and became one of the catalysts for the contemporary debate on the peasantry. It reawakened nationwide interest in the Peasant Uprising of 1846 and tried to revive Szela in a new socio-political context as an avenger and hero of the people. Produced in the buffo convention – from which a serious tone yet emerged with great force – the play received very good reviews and also awards, including from a leading Polish newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which lauded its "most insightful recognition of reality."

In a relatively short time, a whole range of attitudes, views, perspectives, interpretations and perceptions about Szela and the uprising were activated once again. Roughly speaking, these can be classified into three

[1] In referring to this event, I will try to avoid using the term "slaughter" (except for quotations). It is one of the English translations often used in historiography and public discourse for the etymologically unclear term *rabacja*. Dictionaries most often state that it comes from the German *rauben*, "to rob," "to plunder," and Jamka also adopts this etymology (2023: 69). However, Krystyna Poklewska, a literary historian and author of a book on the Peasant Uprising of 1846 in Polish literature, is inclined to derive the word from the Latin noun *rabies*, meaning "rage," "violence," "madness," and from the verb *rabiere*, that is, "to go wild," "to rage." She writes that "'Peasant rage' and 'peasant fury' often appear in accounts as synonyms of 'rabacja'; 'robbery' is only one of its elements" (Poklewska 1986: 32; unless stated otherwise all translations are my own). It is worth remembering that accounts were for the most part written by members of the Polish nobility (*szlachta*), so they were not impartial. The term *rabacja*, especially its English translation as "slaughter," is then an evaluative term, containing a negative assessment and coined in order to anathematise this peasant revolt.

groups or "legends," as Jamka calls them, in accord with the long Polish tradition of referring to narratives about historical figures as "legends." These three legends about Szela are, first, the dominant aristocratic, right-wing, "patriotic," or nationalist "black" legend, in which he is seen as a degenerate criminal and national traitor; second, its reverse, the peasant "white" legend, which considers him to be an avenger of peasant injustice and a hero in the fight to abolish serfdom; and third, the leftist "red" legend, in which he is the first class-conscious revolutionary, a peasant leader of the class struggle. Jamka has successfully undertaken to describe the genesis of these legends, the dynamics of their development, and their different variants, applications, and operationalisations in broad and changing social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, which he duly describes in the introductions to the individual chapters.

Although the title of the book speaks of three legends, Jamka also presents a fourth, the monarchist one. I would call it the "black-and-yellow" legend, in reference to the official colours of the coat of arms of the Habsburg monarchy. In this legend Szela is a loyal Austrian subject who was not seduced by the independence fantasies of the Polish nobility. Today, this fourth legend does not play a very significant role, but it is historically important both in the context of shaping the aristocratic "black" legend, of which it was a kind of a reverse version, and in the context of forming the original version of the peasant "white" legend. The latter was developed in the context of the myth of the "good emperor" as a protector and defender of the peasants from the abuses of the nobility. This myth was widespread in peasant circles in Galicia. Supporters of the "white" legend of Szela began to distance themselves from its monarchist version only after Poland gained independence in 1918.

I said earlier that Jamka's book concerns how Szela and the Galician Peasant Uprising of 1846 function in collective memory. To be more precise, I should say that the book is about this functioning in two types of collective memory: communicative and cultural. To clarify, the distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory (German: *kommunikatives Gedächtnis – kulturelles Gedächtnis*) was made by Jan Assmann (2003: 12–16). In his approach, communicative memory is memory based on the direct and primarily oral transmission of past events by witnesses who share their memories mostly within their family or within the local community in which they live. Today, the concept of local community must also take into account transmission in the virtual space, in particular in social media, where a new type of "glocal" (global-local) virtual community is

being created. It is moreover worth adding that communicative memory is generational memory, with the reservation that it can cover three to four generations, that is, approximately 80 to 100 years. Its further existence is only possible when it is materially or ritually preserved and thus becomes a cultural memory. However, as both Assmann himself and other memory researchers have pointed out, a clear distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory can only be made at the theoretical level; in the social practice of individuals and groups, both types of memory are intertwined. Jamka demonstrates the phenomenon very well, for instance, by indicating how specific books or plays about Szela that belong to cultural memory affect communicative memory.

For cultural memory, both (ritualised) practices in which the past is recalled and all kinds of cultural texts that potentially trigger the work of memory at the individual or collective level are important. Of course, the concept of a "text" should be understood here metonymically or synecdochally, as not solely denoting written texts in the strict sense but actually all cultural products that can become carriers of memory. Jamka's book thoroughly analyses both texts on Szela and the Peasant Uprising of 1846 (diaries, novels, plays, poems, press articles, works of professional historians, works of visual art, films) and various practices related to Szela (for example, naming streets after him, or removing his name from streets). Jamka also shows the functioning of communicative memory concerning Szela and its intermingling with cultural memory. In this respect, the sixth chapter deserves special mention, as it presents hitherto unused sociological field research from 1950 on local memory of Szela. The research was conducted in Szela's home area by a team of sociologists from the University of Warsaw under the direction of Stanisław Ossowski and Stefan Nowakowski.

As an analysis of how the figure of Szela and the peasant uprising function in collective memory, Jamka's book is also an illuminating example of a work written in the paradigm of "second-degree history" as understood by Pierre Nora (2002). In contrast to the narrow understanding of second-degree history as the history of historiography, Nora understands it more broadly as the study of the history of memory, of which historiography is a part.[2] Second-degree history is not so much about "what the past was really like," but about how it has been remembered, how it has been

[2] Although Jamka himself claims that his "research is part of the history of historiography," and although he credits historians with an important role in creating the legends about Szela, he nevertheless notes that "they were not the only ones who contributed to their creation" (Jamka 2023: 44).

represented in cultural texts, and in particular how it has been used and abused and what significance it has had "for particular, successive present times" (Nora 2014: 23). As Kornelia Kończal explains, "Second-degree history in Nora's understanding does not examine the causes of historical events and processes as such, but their construction, their being given meanings, and their driving force" (Kończal 2014: 160). In this sense, Jamka's book is an excellent supplement to Tomasz Szubert's strictly historiographic work *Jak(ó)b Szela (14) 15 July 1787 – 21 April 1860* (2014), which was written in the paradigm of first-degree history. Szubert tries to reach the historical Szela, a real person, while Jamka is interested, so to speak, in Szela's life after life, the symbolic or imagined Szela, the Szela-legend, that is, Szela in second-degree history. As Jamka writes, from his perspective, the first, historical Szela "could not exist" (Jamka 2023: 39).

Jamka's book also brilliantly shows that the works of professional historians, to which the author of *Panów piłą* himself belongs, constitute cultural texts *par excellence* and are thus also part of cultural memory. In this work on a specific case, we can see how, as Maciej Górny puts it, "memory and historiography interpenetrate, providing nourishment and inspiration for each other" (Górny 2013: 200). This happens especially when either the works of historians themselves or certain selected and popularised themes from their work[3] begin to circulate in a broader cultural context after being propagated by various memory makers (Kansteiner 2014: 227): first, artists, writers, directors, publicists, and so forth, who refer to the past in their work; then politicians – both those in power and those aspiring to power – who instrumentally use the work of historians to implement the historical policy they pursue; and finally, history teachers, who implement this policy in historical education. This is exactly what Jamka shows in the case of historical works devoted to Szela and the Galician Peasant Uprising, that is, he shows what a key role these works played in shaping and, above all, sustaining all three legends: the works of Stanisław Schnür-Pepłowski and Kazimierz Ostaszewski-Barański for the black one, the works of Michał Janik and Piotr Rysiewicz for the white one, and the works of Stefan Kieniewicz, Marian Żychowski, and Czesław Wycech for the red one. With insight and nuance, Jamka shows that historians have been the physicians or the policemen of memory, and that often – however paradoxical it may sound – they are both, depending on the ideological lens through which we perceive their work. For the advocates of a given legend,

[3] Including by historians themselves, whether in popularising works, school textbooks, or the historical journalism they practise.

a historian who supports it will be a physician of memory, but for the given legend's opponents, that historian will be a policeman. A German-Jewish philosopher and historian, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, writes movingly that "The historian is the physician of memory. It is his honour to heal wounds, genuine wounds. As a physician must act, regardless of medical theories, because his patient is ill, so the historian must act under a moral pressure to restore a nation's memory, or that of mankind" (Rosenstock-Huessy 1964 [1938]: 696). The problem, however, is that there is no single memory of a nation or even less of humanity.[4] And those who claim that there is such a thing generally universalise the memory of some hegemonic group while silencing the memory of dominated, subordinated, or marginalised groups. In order to legitimise their narratives of the past and thereby their own political, cultural, and economic dominance, they often use historians, who in this way, sometimes even unknowingly, become the policemen of memory: they guard what is to be extracted from the past and what is to be forgotten. Using the case of Szela, Jamka's book meticulously and thoroughly exposes this mechanism. In Chapter 5, which is devoted to the red legend, he comprehensively discusses how the works of historians from the 1930s and the postwar period were, on the one hand, used by the authorities in an – otherwise unsuccessful – project of totally reconstructing the historical consciousness of Poles, and on the other hand, how these works themselves, especially the works created during the Stalinist period, were the effect of the official historical policy of the time.

Jamka also shows the dynamics – if not the dialectics (though this word is probably still out of fashion) – of the relationship between official, hegemonic memory, which is usually supported and promoted by the current authorities, and the counter-memory of subordinated and marginalised groups. In particular, he shows how these memories can, so to speak, change place, as happened after the Second World War in regard to memory of Szela and the Peasant Uprising of 1846, when the hitherto marginalised counter-memory, whether in the form of a white or red legend, became – at least in the brief period of Stalinism – the official memory, propagated and supported by the authorities. Only again, over time, it too became a marginalised counter-memory, especially after the political changes of 1989 (although signs of its depreciation can be traced back as far as October 1956).

[4] This, of course, does not mean that there are no common elements within national memories or the memory of all humanity.

Reading Jamka's book also makes us acutely aware that the conflict or even war of memory over Szela and the Peasant Uprising cannot be resolved or ended. The question, however, arises: should we strive for such an ending at all? Yes, I do see the danger in waging total wars of memory that further antagonise already very divided contemporary societies, including the Polish one. Nevertheless, I would like to note, in recalling Chantal Mouffe, that in a radical and pluralistic democracy, as I hope we still aspire to be, conflicts are inevitable, including conflicts of competing memories. According to Mouffe, we must accept that socio-cultural practices often "confront each other without any possibility of final reconciling" (Mouffe 2015: 99). What we should realistically wish for in this situation is not the mirage of some universal reconciliation and agreement but the actualisation of what, in accord with Jacques Derrida, Mouffe calls "hospitality," a space "in which an agonistic encounter of the variety of poles comes into contact with each other without any of them striving to be superior" (Mouffe 2015: 53). Ryszard Nycz's insightful remarks about Polish memory are in line with Mouffe's and Derrida's views. He rightly observes that

> striving to overcome contradictions, reconcile positions, and resolve disputes seems to be an unrealistic and counterproductive undertaking. This is also because what seems to be a barrier and obstacle is the actual keystone of community existence, and perhaps a factor in its relative specialness or uniqueness. Whether we like it or not, this fierce antagonism, which, like the "eternal" conflicts in the Balkans, the Middle East, or the Far East, is incomprehensible to others – this interlocked rivalry of Cossack and Tatar (or of left and right, Catholics and "freethinkers," nationalists and advocates of the universal or civic cause, majorities and minorities, peasants and "lords," etc., etc.) – creates a space of opposing reasons, which are communal because they are obvious to us, and whose agonistic connections sustain and, as a result, ensure the relative continuity, unity, and duration of divided/shared Polish memory.[5] (Nycz 2017: 152)

If we agree with Nycz's diagnosis, this means, among other things, that we must recognise the pluralistic nature of memory, that is, come to terms with the diversity of often contradictory visions of the past, including those concerning the Polish peasantry, as Jamka has shown in his book. And if we also agree – which is probably not difficult – that the

[5] In the Polish original: *podzielo(a)na pamięć*.

phenomenon of memory is constitutive of both individual and collective identity, then *Panów piłą* can also be considered an important contribution to the analysis of our divided/shared Polish identity.

In this respect, Jamka's work is worth comparing with one published in 2016: Michał Montowski's book *Krew, która woła. Pamięć i niepamięć o rzezi galicyjskiej 1846* [Blood That Cries Out: Memory and Forgetting of the Galician Slaughter of 1846],[6] which, by the way, Jamka does not mention at all. This is somewhat surprising, given the outstanding erudition of Jamka's work. Although based on slightly different methodological assumptions, both books concern the same topic: Szela and the afterlife of the Galician Peasant Uprising in collective Polish memory. But also, and perhaps even above all, on a deeper level they touch on the issue, as Jamka puts it, of "negotiation of the Polish model of citizenship" (Jamka 2023: 36), or as Montowski writes, "the formation of the post-feudal society and the modern Polish nation" (Montowski 2017a: 1). Using the specific example of Szela and the Peasant Uprising of 1846, they also confirm the validity of Nycz's above-mentioned observations, that is, they show how important both memory and counter-memory are for the formation of a collective Polish identity – how, while fighting each other, they nevertheless influence, shape, and negotiate one another. Jamka seems to be closer to the white and red legends, while Montowski is closer to the black one, with an emphasis on the negative role of the Austrians and the tragedy of the whole situation from the national point of view. Nevertheless, both seem to consider that the Galician Peasant Uprising, though bloody, aided the peasantry in throwing off the yoke of serfdom and enforced labour (*pańszczyzna*). Montowski writes that:

> The Galician Slaughter destroyed a potential (intended but unfulfilled) founding myth of the Polish nation. The initiation of the peasantry into social freedom was paid in the bloodshed of Polish patriots and innocent victims of a brutality seemingly unleashed by a natural element in the wildest, darkest layers of the people. The terrible, traumatic reality created an unfillable crack in the great myth of a Polish historical consciousness laboriously forged in defiance of the partitioners. An idealistic interpretation of the

[6] Montowski's book is available online as a doctoral thesis written under the supervision of Professor Zbigniew Mikołejko. This version (Montowski 2017b), which is almost identical to the book, has a different title: *Trauma społeczna w długim doświadczeniu historycznym. Przypadek rabacji chłopskiej 1846 r.* [Social Trauma in Long Historical Experience: The Case of the Peasant Slaughter of 1846].

> history of society and the vision of its future as a modern Polish nation that grew out of it – after the slaughter – were no longer possible. However, in the brutal conflict of the estates (*stany*), the formation of a modern Polish identity had to begin with the gradual fusion of the nation of the nobility and the newly emerging peasant nation. (Montowski 2016: 386)

Jamka fascinatingly demonstrates that this was not an easy process and that in fact this fusion has not ended to the present day. Using the example of the three (or rather four) legends about Szela, he also shows that the identity narrative of the "nation of the nobility," which was later taken up by the "republic of the intelligentsia," was the dominant narrative all along, except perhaps during the brief period of Stalinism. It is difficult to predict whether the current attempt – under the banner of the somewhat oxymoronic-sounding people's turn of the intelligentsia – to "change the model of citizenship […] by supplementing it with a peasant component" "under the patronage of Szela" (Jamka 2023: 376) will succeed.

First, as Jamka meticulously noted, even though some prominent representatives of the people's turn (for example, Kacper Pobłocki and Maciej Szajkowski) unanimously acknowledge the exploitation and violence of the nobility in regard to the serfs – as did certain peasant activists in the Second Polish Republic and even some memory makers in the People's Republic of Poland (especially after October 1956) – they do not agree to this patronage. They distance themselves from Szela himself, though not from the Galician Peasant Uprising, and accept some arguments of the supporters of the black legend.[7]

In principle, it is difficult to find any serious flaws in Jamka's book. Nevertheless, I will allow myself a few critical remarks, which, I wish to emphasise, in no way compromise my positive assessment of the work as a whole. Apart from Montowski's book, I would like to indicate two other omissions in Jamka's work, and to correct some minor inaccuracies and discrepancies. Perhaps the author will want to take these remarks into account in a second edition of his book.

Jamka describes in great detail the attitude of peasant activists to Szela and the Galician Uprising at the beginning of the twentieth century, and in interwar and early postwar Poland. He analyses the attitude of such a prominent peasant leader as Wincenty Witos, among others. Jamka

[7] For example, Kacper Pobłocki (2021) is particularly angry with Szela for being violent with his wives.

rightly notes that, after 1956, the communist-licensed peasant movement rather silenced the memory of Szela, and certainly did not intend to make a hero of him. There was a return to the strategy of peasant activists at the beginning of the century. This strategy was also adopted by the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe; PSL) after 1989,[8] although Jamka does not write about it. That is, we do not learn what the attitude of the PSL towards Szela was after the fall of communism. What is more, we do not learn what the attitude was among more radical peasant circles, especially those united under the banner of Samoobrona (Self-Defence). It is worth recalling that the leader of Self-Defence, Andrzej Lepper, was often called the new Szela – in the decidedly negative context of the black legend. Did Lepper refer directly to this comparison to Szela? What was his attitude towards the wheelwright from Smarzowa and the Peasant Uprising? Unfortunately, we will not find answers to these questions in Jamka's book, in which Lepper is not even mentioned.

Jamka also devotes considerable space to theatrical and film portrayals of Szela, especially those in Stanisław Wyspiański's *Wesele* [The Wedding] and its film adaptation by Andrzej Wajda, Stefan Żeromski's *Turoń*, Bruno Jasieński's *Słowo o Jakubie Szeli* [A Word about Jakub Szela],[9] Stanisław Różewicz's *Pasja* [The Passion], and Paweł Demirski's *In the Name of Jakub S*. It would be worth at least mentioning that Szela and the peasant insurgents also appeared in a Polish para-documentary film of 1924, *Odrodzona Polska* [Reborn Poland], directed by Zygmunt Wesołowski. In the intentions of Stanisław Martynowski and his partner Edmund Nowicki, its originators and producers, this full-length film, which was shot on a grand scale, was to present all the lands of Poland reunited after the partitions. It was supposed to show – as Małgorzata Hendrykowska writes – "the most important historical events of a given region, its monuments, characteristic landscapes, scenes from the life of the people, and the achievements of industry, trade, and agriculture, the military and sport" (Hendrykowska

[8] Established in 1990, the Polish People's Party was on the one hand a continuation of the political peasant movement from the times of the Polish People's Republic, and on the other hand, it underlined its connection with the prewar peasant movement and Mikołajczyk's PSL.

[9] Here I would like to point out a certain discrepancy in Jamka's book: on p. 19, referring to Michał Kmiecik's adaptation of *A Word about Jakub Szela* at the Stanisław Wyspiański Silesian Theatre in Katowice in 2017, he claims that "This heroic image of the peasant from Smarzowa last appeared on theatrical posters in the 1970s." On p. 346, however, he states that "in 1975, the last performance of *A Word about Jakub Szela* by Jasieński took place (until 2009)." And this second piece of information given in brackets is correct. However, Jamka does not write anything more about it. It is therefore worth adding that *A Word about Jakub Szela* was staged in 2009 by Jacek Majok as a monodrama at the Theatre in the Block in Gdańsk, with a premiere on 23 March.

1998: 1330). Of this ambitious plan, only the part devoted to Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) was realised, but since it was to be the first film in the planned series, the scriptwriters – historians Kazimierz Michał Krotowski and Stanisław Zabrzeski – did not limit themselves to topics connected with Greater Poland (the Września children's strike, the Drzymała family's wagon, the Greater Poland Uprising). The authors also showed an allegory of the partition of Poland, the image of prisoners in tsarist jails, the peace conference in Versailles and, last but not least, the Galician Peasant Uprising, presented in accord with the black legend. As Marek and Małgorzata Hendrykowski, historians of Polish cinema, write of this fragment of the film, "drunken peasants approach Austrian officials sitting at a table, throw the heads of landowners at their feet, and stretch out their hands for money" (Hendrykowska & Hendrykowski 2008: 34). The film, which was preceded by a truly American-style advertising campaign, was received quite enthusiastically, especially in Poznań, where, after its premiere in the Poznań University Auditorium on Christmas Eve 1924, it was played three times a day for two weeks to a packed auditorium. It was, of course, also shown in many other Polish cities, often at free screenings organised by various cultural and educational institutions. It then certainly contributed to the strengthening of the black legend of Szela in the interwar period. For a very long time – from the Second World War to the beginning of the twenty-first century – *Reborn Poland* was considered a lost film. In 2000, the Hendrykowskis found small fragments of it in an archive in Bois d'Arcy near Paris. It is astonishing that until now these fragments have not been remastered or digitised, and therefore are not publicly available, especially since, as the Hendrykowskis report, in 2000 they were being kept in a number of metal cans on nitro tape and were "not in the best condition."

As for the few inaccuracies in *Panów piłą*, let me note that Jamka incorrectly states that in 2014 "councillors of the capital of Lower Silesia changed the name of Jakub Szela Square to Ptasi Zagajnik Square" (Jamka 2023: 354). According to my knowledge, based on the minutes of the relevant council meeting, the Wrocław councillors did indeed remove the name of this square on 20 March 2014, but they did not give it a new name at the time (this was not necessary, as all the buildings located near the square had a different address – Skwierzyńska Street). It was not until October 2015 that the square was given the name Ptasi Zagajnik (Bird Grove). It is also worth adding here that, contrary to what Jamka suggests, the removal of Szela's name from the square in Wrocław did not mean that his name did not appear anywhere in Poland. There is still a place in

our country that has a street named after him. It is in a small village in the Opole region, Solarnia. The street is Szela Street (ulica Szeli), not Jakub Szela Street (although there is also a separate Jakub Street (ulica Jakuba) nearby, connected by Insurgents Street (ulica Powstańców), which is probably why it has escaped today's anti-Szelistas. Did it also escape Jamka? Or perhaps he deliberately omitted the information out of fear that if he did provide it, the effect could be that soon the councillors of Bierawa Commune, where Solarnia is located, would be approached by today's street-name cleaners, who, as "experts in the only true truth," would explain to the councillors that it is not appropriate for the village to disgrace itself with the name of a bandit from the Tarnów region. Thus, the only place in Poland where the leader of the peasant rebellion is still – probably out of inertia – commemorated today would disappear from the map of Poland. I myself had this dilemma when I wrote in one of my books about memory of the Peasant Uprising of 1846 (Wasiewicz 2023). However, I decided – and I still maintain my opinion – that even if the councillors are indeed forced to change the name of the street, the public disclosure of the fact that 30 years after the fall of pseudo-communism, Jakub Szela still has his own street in a Polish village – and its residents are not at all bothered by the fact – is significant and shows that the dominant narrative of seeing him as a criminal is not the only narrative, and certainly not the only correct one – as Jamka, by the way, demonstrated perfectly in his work.

Moving towards a conclusion – as I said, these minor critical remarks in no way diminish the value of the work being reviewed here. Ryszard Jamka's book, *Panów piłą*, shows in a detailed, illuminating, and captivating manner that Jakub Szela and the anti-feudal uprising of the Galician peasants in 1846 are still living and important components of Poland's divided/shared memory, as the great Polish writer, Stefan Żeromski, quite prophetically foretold when he wrote in the 1920s in his *Elegie* [Elegies] that "It seems to me that today's Poland must first and foremost experience the issue that bears the name 'Jakób Szela'" (Żeromski 1928: 316). The issue, as Franciszek Ziejka noted in 1984, is not only "Szela with a double face" as "hero of the peasant struggle for freedom" and "national traitor" (Ziejka 1984: 264), but, as Jamka shows, Szela with a triple, or even – like Sviatovid – a quadruple face, if we assume that in addition to the black, white, and red legends, there is also the black-and-yellow one, that is, the monarchical pro-Austrian legend. Although for most of the book, Jamka avoids unequivocally declaring himself in favour of any of the legends, in the final parts he seems to lean towards the white-and-red Szela, calling

him "a true political leader" who is "closer […] to a revolutionary than to a reformer" (Jamka 2023: 367). Which legend will eventually take the upper hand is, of course, difficult to know. Jamka does not know either, as he honestly admits. One thing, however, is beyond doubt: "Regardless of which legend ultimately prevails, Szela's place in history is secure" (Jamka 2023: 376). The same can be said for the place of Jamka's book in historiography and memory studies.

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