

Summary

European Litanic Verse: A Different Space-Time

The term “litanic verse” refers to poetic works that are constructed around the pattern characteristic of Church litanies, namely that of enumerating a series of parallel sentences. The same pattern can be observed in utterances of various forms, such as artistic works, prayers, political speeches, folk songs, or pop lyrics. The book describes the origin of litanic verse and explains the roots of its specific rhythmic form.

The litanic structure corresponds to ancient cosmological ideas. It was believed that the universe could be perceived in two different ways: either through the prism of sensual understanding alone, which results in apparent rather than real knowledge, or alternatively through contemplation, which leads to a true understanding of the universe, its spherical and concentric structure and the relations between individual beings that are very different from what they may appear to a casual observer. The central argument of this book is that the litany came into being in an attempt to transpose the cosmological knowledge into a rhythmic form of text. The litanic pattern allowed ancient man to understand the main rule of space-time, according to which a single God is the source of all the diversity in the world. In this way, the litany, which is based on a multiplication of various phrases built around a common word, was aimed at illustrating the paradox of the infinite contained in the One that is indivisible.

Accordingly, an immanent component of the litany is its generic worldview. As a result of this, it can be said that litanic verse is an expression of a semantic content which is inscribed not in the meaning of individual words, but in its rhythmic form. It is assumed that the litanic space-time can accommodate the names of all the phenomena and processes that appear in the world (physical,

mental, social, linguistic, as well as spiritual). It is for this reason that the litanic genre allowed the fusion of three, originally very different, literary traditions. In this book these traditions are called genes, namely the ektenial, chairetismic and polyonymic genes. The present monograph presents a detailed genealogy of each of these genes, with a particular focus on their representations in the Old Testament, as well as in the ancient literature of Egyptian, Syrian, Greek and Latin provenance.

Until about the thirteenth century, the litany was a genre in which the musical, poetic, and religious layers were inextricably interconnected. After that time, a process began which led to a differentiation between various types of litanies. This book traces the emergence of the poetic litany to the middle of the nineteenth century. Its specific features are described on the basis of poetic works, composed by representatives of different European nations and in various European languages, but focuses especially on those in English, French, Latin, and Italian.

translated by Dominika Ruszkiewicz