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# **“Our monuments are ambiguous...” : On Różewicz's Epitaphs.**

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### “Our monuments are ambiguous...”: On Różewicz’s Epitaphs<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth’s “Essay upon Epitaphs,” one of the founding texts of the Romantic concept of elegiac poetry and aesthetics of the Sublime, important also for their modern varieties, reads:

And, verily, without the consciousness of a principle of immortality in the human soul, Man could never have had awakened in him the desire to live in the remembrance of his fellows... neither could the individual dying have had a desire to survive in the remembrance of his fellows, nor on their side could they have felt a wish to preserve for future times vestiges of the departed; it follows, as a final inference, that without the belief in immortality, wherein these several desires originate, neither monuments nor epitaphs, in affectionate or laudatory commemoration of the deceased, could have existed in the world. (Wordsworth 605-7)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the translation by Adam Czerniawski in: Różewicz, T. *Poezje Wybrane. Selected Poems*. Wydawnictwo Literackie: Kraków, 1994. All quotations from Joanna Trzeciak’s translation in: Różewicz, T. *Sobbing Superpower: Selected Poems of Tadeusz Różewicz*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2011. Quotations from Bill Johnston’s translation in: Różewicz, T. *New Poems*. Archipelago Books, 2007. Where English translations were unavailable, I propose my own working version of the quoted passages based on the following Polish editions of Różewicz’s work: *Utwory zebrane*, Vol. 1-12. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2003-2006; *Proza* Vol. 3 [Pr3, page number]; *Poezja* Vol. 1 [P1, page number]; *Poezja*, t. 2 [P2, page number]; *Poezja*, t. 3 [P3, page number]; *Poezja*, Vol. 4 [P4, page number]; *Matka odchodzi* [M, page number], *Plaskorzeźba*. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie: Wrocław, 1991. [P1, page number].

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth, W. “Essay upon Epitaphs.” *Poetry & Prose*, selected by W.M. Merchant, Rupert Hart-Davis, London: 1955. 605-607.

The following paper is an attempt to highlight the differences between Różewicz's idea of a poetry of mourning and the model postulated by Wordsworth. Różewicz reinterprets several characteristics of the latter, such as the category of Sublime, elegiac mood of sorrow and nostalgia, poetics of prosopopeia, as well as faith in the power of poetic imagination confronted with finality. He also re-evaluates several classical funeral topoi, including the monument of poetry, the notion of eternal fame, the concept of *non omnis moriar*, consolation motifs and laudations of the departed, and the belief in the indestructibility of cultural memory. In Różewicz, the "principle of immortality in the human soul" is replaced by a reflection on the importance of remembering and the inevitability of forgetting, the indestructibility of trace, and the omnipresence of disintegration. His reflection on mortality and immortality, permanence and impermanence, presence and absence, (auto)redemptive power of poetry and the inevitability of loss is almost exemplary in its ambiguity.<sup>3</sup> His meditation on emptiness and form, and the ethical and moral dilemma of inexpressibility and non-representativeness of death are of importance, too.

Speaking of the role of memory in Różewicz's work, I am referring to both individual experience and cultural memory, the latter, in Różewicz's case, skeptical and revisionary, always aware of the painful areas of discontinuity, referencing tradition in a manner akin to Vattimo's *Verwindung*. Różewicz reaches for European topoi and myths usually to stress their semantic devaluation or ambiguity. They remain, however, a necessary and familiar cultural ground for his work. By constituting its fundamental negative reference field, tradition also becomes one of integral components of Różewicz's writing. An analogous strategy can be observed in the area of "genre memory" of elegiac literature.

Elegiac poetry, especially its variety that stems directly from the classical tradition, is one of the clearest realizations of the "strong" concept of literature understood as a signifying activity of an individual establishing for itself a permanent cultural biography and existence stored in the common memory and independent from the finiteness of biological life, the inevitability of passing and physical disintegration. The theme of "eternal fame," important for literature as defined above, in elegiac poetry takes the form of homage paid to the deceased, a praise of their virtue, their elevation and glorification. Meta-poetical reflections on the power of poetry express certainty that art can ensure immortality or at least its substitute. This is because the word, sanctioned metaphysically by its relation to Logos – the eternal and holy proto-model and a constant center – is characterized by permanence, a clear meaning and a stable, hierarchical relation between the sign and the signified.

<sup>3</sup> I understand "ambiguity" to be "a 'conjunction of mutually exclusive alternatives' in its strict, strong sense, fundamentally different from 'semantic indeterminacy' proposed by Ryszard Nycz in his discussion of the semantics of Różewicz's poetry („Tadeusza Różewicza 'tajemnicza okaleczona poezja.'" *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości*. Universitas, Kraków: 2001. 197) "Utterance constructed in such a fashion always results in an antinomy of blanket interpretative hypotheses, leading inevitably to a kind of cognitive deadlock, a trap of irresolvable choice." (Ibid. 198.)

Two Horatian topoi: *exegi momentum* and *non omnis moriar* are constitutive for this poetry that has the power of expressing, making permanent, and eternalizing. Both of them “rely on perfection and finiteness of artistic form – in two senses of the Latin *perfectum*” (Zawadzki xviii).<sup>4</sup> They are an expression of faith in the permanence of the subject – both the poet (as in Horace’s “Exegi monumentum” and “Non usitata”) and the person sung about – guaranteed by the continuity of memory. Horace’s “Donarem pateras,” places the of poetic laudation above the commemorative value of monuments.<sup>5</sup>

In “Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland (In Memory of Paul Celan),” Różewicz recalls Horace’s *non omnis moriar* but arrives at its paradoxical opposite: “I know that I shall wholly die/ and from this flows/ the small comfort.”<sup>6</sup> (SS 170) Is “existence” to be understood as homeless vegetation in a deserted “world / the gods had left”? Does existence “outside of poetry” – voluntarily giving up on poetry in favor of the truth of experience juxtaposed against literary, cultural, and eschatological myths – not rather seem a lacking condition? How is “existence” to be understood: as “that which remains” – enduring and surviving through time – or “that which continues to exist” – eternal permanence despite time, a feature of indestructibility.<sup>7</sup> Why does the thought of death as annihilation, ultimate destruction of life, bring comfort? What does it mean to “wholly die”?

<sup>4</sup> Zawadzki, A. „Koniec nowoczesności: nihilizm, hermeneutyka, sztuka.” In: Vattimo, G. *Koniec nowoczesności*. Trans. by M. Surma-Gawłowska. Introduction by A. Zawadzki. Universitas, Kraków: 2006.xviii.

<sup>5</sup> Różewicz parodies or negates Horatian themes. In *On All Fours*, he dissects the myth of the monumentalized poet-laureate, parodying the topoi of wings of poetry and poetic monument. In one of the short stories, “Róża,” an exalted recitation of Kochanowski’s “Hymn 24” [Pieśń XXIV] at an author’s evening is juxtaposed against the distractedness and trite thoughts of the poet. In “\*\*\* (Kto mi związał ręce)” [Whoever tied my hands] the impossibility of poetic flight is neither grotesque, nor ironic – it is an image of a “crippled poet,” cut off from the transcendental dimension of reality.

<sup>6</sup> For future reference I am quoting the discussed passage in full: “I know that I shall wholly die/ and from this flows/the small comfort// which gives me strength/ to exist outside of poetry.” („Wiem że umrę cały / i stąd plynie/ ta słaba pociecha// która daje mi siłę/ trwania poza poezją.) It is important to note that the Polish verb “trwać” (“exist” in the quoted passage) also means “to remain” or “to continue to exist.” [PP]

<sup>7</sup> There are two possible readings of Hölderlin’s line [from “Remembrance”] „Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter” quoted by Różewicz in his poem titled „To jednak co trwa ustanowione jest przez poetów” [That which remains is established by the poets.] In his interpretation, G. Vattimo emphasizes enduring, as tied to the concept of monument and trace, while Heidegger stresses permanence. It would be interesting to situate Różewicz’s reading in relation to these two, although due to obvious constraints doing so is impossible in this essay. See: Vattimo, G. *End of modernity and Heidegger*, M. “Holderlin and the essence of poetry.” *Elucidations of Holderlin’s Poetry*. Translated to Polish by S. Lisiecka. KR, Warszawa: 2004.

Our monuments  
are ambiguous  
they are shaped like a pit

our monuments  
are shaped  
like a tear

moles  
built our monuments  
under the earth  
our monuments  
are shaped like smoke  
they go straight to heaven

(Różewicz 1994 73)

Zbigniew Majchrowski believes the monument to be the most important motif in Różewicz's poetic imagination and astutely identifies its multiple versions and obsessive repetitiveness as an attempt at answering the question about the "shape of memory."<sup>8</sup> I would supplement the discussion of the commemorative issue in Różewicz (including remembrance, homage, memory) with the question of representation and expressibility implied by the monument (as well as the related themes of stone, sculpture, and cathedral).

A monument "shaped like a pit" is tied to the drastic image of death as falling, a characteristic of Różewicz's early poetry and stemming from the conviction of the impossibility of resurrection and ultimate decomposition of the human body stripped of the sacral dimension of corporeality. An oneiric vision of a grave that no longer signifies the passage from the carnality of earthly existence towards eternal life of the soul returns also in one of his later poems "\*\*\*\* (wicher dobijał się do okien)" [wind battered the windows]. Monument "shaped like smoke" sends us to "Masacre of the Boys" and "\*\*\*\* (Einst hab ich die Muse gefragt...)" where the tree loses its symbolic value of a cultural topos, transformed into "a tree of black smoke," a "dead tree/ with no star in its crown." (Różewicz 1994 21) These appear to be two variations of a "counter-monument" which through its (non)existence touches the problem of visual representation of liminal experience and the monumentalization of memory.<sup>9</sup> Różewicz seems to be aware of the fact that once memory is assigned the form of monument, we relieve ourselves, to an extent, of the duty to remember.

<sup>10</sup> His "ambiguous" monuments neither elevate (also in the "spatial" meaning of

<sup>8</sup> Majchrowski, Z. „Pomniki w życiu i twórczości Tadeusza Różewicza.[Monuments in Różewicz's life and work]" Presentation at „Przekraczanie Granic" conference, Wrocław 27-30 March 2006. Post-conference volume [in print].

<sup>9</sup> *Counter-monument* is a form of monument to the memory of Shoah victims that negates and destroys itself, disappearing with time, leaving an empty space and lasting only in the living human memory.

<sup>10</sup> See: Leoni, G. "The First Blow": Projects from the Camp at Fossoli." *Holocaust Remembrance. The Shapes of Memory*. G. Hartman (ed.) Blackwell, Oxford, UK-Cambridge, Mass: 1994.

the word), nor eternalize, as they are easily annihilated themselves in the process of organic decomposition, their feeble condition and shapelessness a testimony to universal destructibility.<sup>11</sup>

Różewicz's "Preparations for a Poetry Reading," both volumes of *Dzienniki* [Diaries] and all of his books of poetry contain an elegiac cycle which expands continuously through addition of new poems devoted to the memory of close and distant friends, mostly poets, writers and critics as well as important artists unknown in person. Two commemorative volumes: *Our Elder Brother* and *Mother Departs* have a special status among his writing. I would like to devote my attention to these two works in particular, their obituaries, epitaphs, meditations and commemorations, and to the concepts of "the other side," memory and poetry inscribed in them.

Memory in Różewicz is an ambiguous force. On the one hand, it is a kind of moral obligation, as it establishes the identity of man, community and culture, even when it is the "acute" kind of memory, one testifying to loss and "unattainable wholeness" rather than completeness of any kind (Kunz 225).<sup>12</sup> In fact, rejecting the illusion of repair, the poet seems to valorize negative experiences that brand with inerasable trauma. His reference to Hölderlin's hymnal "Remembrance" [Andenken] (in "To jednak co trwa" [That which remains]), where Hölderlin points to the special role of the poet as the agent "establishing" reality and ensuring its endurance through remembrance and commemoration seems of importance in this context.

On the other hand, the imperative to remember becomes a curse to the living and appears as a force oppressive to the body, threatening the psychological and physical integrity of the Self. Eventually, it transforms into a sense of guilt, betrayal and denial of the deceased. This ambivalence accompanies the poet from the earliest verses in *Anxiety* and *Red Glove* (see: "Mask" and "To the Dead") to his "late" work:<sup>13</sup> "I poet – shepherd of life/ have become shepherd of the dead/ I have labored too long on the pastures/ of your cemeteries Depart now/ you dead leave me/ in peace// this is a matter for the living" (Różewicz 2007 72-73).

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<sup>11</sup> The theme of "poet as a mole," an antithesis of "poet as a bird" complements the discussed phenomenon. It evokes the value-giving spatial associations with solarity, lightness, exaltation, and purity – the "mole poet" is oriented at the earthly, heavy, low, and dirty. The mole as a meta-poetic theme appears in Różewicz paired with a reflection on old age and death (in "Teraz") or re-evaluation of his work and maturation into silence („*To jednak co trwa...*" "[That which remains...]. It is also significant that the motifs of monument as a "black mound" of soil („*czarny kopczyk*"), and the "poet as a mole" return also in the commemorative "Elegia (pamięci Cz. M.)" [Elegy. To the memory of Cz. M.]

<sup>12</sup> Kunz, T. *Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza. Od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury*, Universitas: Kraków. 2005. 225.

<sup>13</sup> In his essay titled "Wounded Poet." (To the memory of M. Jastrun) Różewicz writes: "I often tell myself: stop that! Stop writing epitaphs. Run away from this growing cemetery. But then I recall Jastrun's words: 'If you still remember, write it down... may not everything be lost in this country.' And I sit down to my 'craft,' rebellious and angry, I begin to move my hand with a pen across paper." (Pr3, 386)

## Czesław Miłosz and the Polish School of Poetry

For the dead, being “locked inside memory” entails an almost physical, compulsory connection to life; it entails impossibility to depart and dissolve into nothingness, necessity to remain in the liminal, ontologically unstable emptiness filled with traces: “The dead inhabit my life. They start to live rich lives in the landscape of my memory... Am I to write the book of the dead? Is it not better to bury [them] and leave towards future?” („Tożsamość (wspomnienie o Karolu Kuryluku),” Pr3 78-79). At this point we have arrived, I believe, at a fundamental contradiction governing Różewicz’s complicated vision of “the beyond” and his ambiguous concept of mourning. On the one hand, “writing a memory about the Dead is almost always a fight against time and death for me. It’s an attempt to summon the Dead... To raise the Dead with the word. To turn him back, tear him away from the land of the Dead... Do they live only as long as their image does in our memory? A perceptible and corporeal image.” (Zamknięcie” Pr3 95-97) On the other hand: “I recall the dead more and more often, even though I am reluctant to write about them. I wanted to bury them and bid them farewell in poetry.” („Tożsamość” Pr3, 78).

Różewicz is aware of the inconclusive character of his eschatological and meta-poetical reflection: “When I write, I pile up contradictions. And this is all I can offer him.” (Pr, 12) he says in one of the essays, “Zostanie po mnie pusty pokój” [An Empty Room Will Be What’s Left Of Me], to the memory of Leopold Staff. The self-contradictory vision of “the other side” emerging from his commemorative and elegiac work reveals itself, as Maria Janion astutely observes, already on the level of language, in a specific construction of phrase that “foreshadows a declaration of faith and concludes as a declaration of lack of faith” (Janion 151).<sup>14</sup>

Now as I write these words Mother’s eyes, peaceful and watchful rest upon me.  
She looks at me from “the other world” the others side which I don’t believe in  
*(Teraz [Now], M, 10).*

For a few months now  
my Friend  
Kornel Filipowicz  
has been in the otherworld  
while I continue in this one

I do not believe in the afterlife  
so I am trying to understand  
your crossing the threshold  
into the otherworld

“Conversation with a Friend” (Różewicz 2011 171)

I would like to let this paradox resound fully, emphasize that Różewicz’s poetry of mourning situates itself somewhere in-between “I do not believe” and “I am trying to understand.” I do not think it necessary to try and arrive at all costs at a single conclusion and impose a definite interpretation onto all those contradictions. One

<sup>14</sup> Janion, M. „To co trwa.” *Twórczość* 2000 Vol. 5:151.

should rather accept both poles of Różewicz's antitheses and attempt to articulate the nuances of this ungraspable and notoriously ambiguous thanatological conception.

Różewicz's contradictions seem derive from his reflection on the "expiring of the Absolute" ["Wygasanie Absolutu"] that brings about the fatal erosion of language and poetry. He "writes continuously about the death of poetry, which corresponds to writing about the death of God; he seems to find an analogy between poetry and God" (195).<sup>15</sup> His elegiac reflection oscillates between the word and the body; by incorporating what seems impossible to coexist, it places equation marks between biology, psychology, and semiotics. It moves fluidly between different "dimensions of death": from the literal, biological death, dying off and decomposition of matter, through the death of the soul and memory, word and art, to the disappearance of *sacrum*.

A fundamental question Różewicz seems to be asking is as follows: can poetry that "is dead...that is mortal" (Pr3, 163) save anything in any way or make anything permanent? How can the word, devoid of its metaphysical foundation, impermanent and helpless against disintegration, eternalize and ensure immortality? Perhaps the word is only a trace reminding of loss, a space where that which is absent resounds and seeks shelter? If so, the only function of poetry of mourning would be serving as a hardly consolable "vigil of death," a defense of its irreducibility and incomprehensibility, "chasing shadows that run away into nothingness or guarding the empty space marked by those shadows" (Rewers 311; Żukowski 69).<sup>16</sup>

How to write in a dying language about the dying of man? If the writing of elegiac poetry is doomed to failure (in the sense of the impossibility of "raising the Dead with the word"), does it inevitably entail an even more painful failure of "adding one death to another...the experience of double death?" (Skrendo 150).<sup>17</sup>

How does one invent a language and manner of representation which would ensure not a form of immortality to man inasmuch as they would save the fact of death from aesthetization and fetishization by its becoming a literary "topos" or "theme." It would have to be poetry that, paradoxically, ensures immortality to death itself as an event that is unimaginable and inexpressible, an event that cannot be easily assimilated in the formal order of the cultural organization of experience. It would have to be language as something more than a continuation of the deadly annihilation by representation. The question of appropriateness, of the right to cross an unspeakable line with the use of word and image, of entanglement in conventions that figure and aestheticize the originally amorphous and asemantic inhuman reality, lies at the crux of Różewicz's funeral poetry.

Among the most moving moments of "Dziennik gliwicki," [Gliwice diaries] some passages of which were included in *Mother Departs*, there is a scene where the poet-

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. „Nadmiar bólu.” *Żyjąc tracimy życie. Niepokojące tematy egzystencji*. W.A.B., Warszawa: 2001. 195.

<sup>16</sup> Rewers, E. „Pustka i forma” *Teksty Drugie* 2002 Vol. 2/3. 311. Żukowski, T. „Non omnis moriar?” *Res Publica Nowa*. 2000 Vol. 5. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Skrendo, A. *Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury. Poetyka i etyka transgresji*, Universitas, Kraków: 2002. 150.

son reads poetry to the dying woman. “I wanted to read a few poems to the Mother, but she falls asleep; she is weakened. The poems sounded so strange anyway, so distant” (M, 108). There is something fundamentally inappropriate, even cruel, in it, something that the poet himself is well aware of. The thought of the unacceptable incompatibility of art to suffering and a sense of guilt caused by the “dry eyes of the poet” who imperturbably continues to polish the form of his “lamentations” is one of the most important, most recurrent topics of the volume. The scene returns in another poem “\*\*\* (Ukryłem twarz w dłoniach)” [I hid my face in my hands] to the memory of Helmut Kajzar: “I brought him a poem/ I read and voice failed me/ he died/ and I have lived for 22310 days already/ twenty two thousand/ three hundred and ten” (P3 205).

The aporetic vision of “the other side” and the border between the world of the living and the world of the dead is another fundamental problem in Różewicz’s work. In his poetic sketch, “Znałem boga poezji” [I knew the god of poetry], a part of “Zostanie po mnie pusty pokój” [An Empty Room Will Be What’s Left Of Me], “the other side” is presented as the deepest, stony silence, as the great Nothing. Similarly, in “A Conversation With A Friend” or “Kartki wydarte z dziennika” [Pages torn from a journal]: “More and more of them pass to the ‘other side,’ And then, great calm will come. Nothing. Neither salvation, nor damnation or Last Judgment, neither hell nor heaven, nor transmigration of souls. The great Nothing that day after day is coming to me.” (Pr3, 350)

Różewicz’s “Nothing” is sometimes “constructive and affirmative...dynamic and active” („Nic, czyli wszystko” [Nothing, in other words, everything] (Pr3, 183)), a false substitute of dying reality that fills the ontological void. On the other hand, his “Nothing” is always a lack. It is always a “space left behind” („Zamek na lodzie. (Notatka z lutego 1962 roku)” [Castle built on ice. A note from Feb. 1962] (Pr3 174)).<sup>18</sup> Trauma, a sense of “hollowness” and “acute memory” of the poet defending emptiness as emptiness, rejecting easy consolation and hasty restitution of degraded values, are a response to the acute “lack of reality,” to the absence of ground and vertical dimension of the world (Kunz 225; Skrendo 118).<sup>19</sup> A wound healing too quickly and forgetting about the loss would be the essence of ethical nihilism.

And “Nothing” after death reveals itself as an empty space of silence and stillness, as in the poem “Doors” in which: “in the illuminated landscape/ a third door/ opens/ and beyond it in a mist/ towards the back/ a little to the left/ or in

<sup>18</sup> It is an essay of special importance for Różewicz’s reflection on the cultural and moral crisis of modernity and parallel inventiveness in the search for adequate forms of representation for inexpressible and irrepresentable experiences. A meditation on the liminal status of emptiness (between being and non-being) returns in the poem “Bocca della Verita” and in “Kartki wydarte z ‘dziennika gliwickiego” [Pages torn from Gliwice diary]: “External world, nature; all of it surrounds interior that is empty. But this emptiness has a form – it appears as hunger, thirst, waiting. Is there a food that will finally feed the hunger of contemporary man?” (Pr3, 317)

<sup>19</sup> Kunz, T. *Strategie negatywne*, ... 225. Skrendo, A. „Niewczesna poezja Różewicza.” *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 2006 Vol. 2. 118.

the centr/ I see / Nothing" (M 63). Considering the context of *Mother Departs* and its eschatological vision, it seems particularly important that the poem, which has four versions and alternate endings, was rewritten again and given a different one (Skrendo 198-9).<sup>20</sup> A clearer separation and substantiation of "Nothing" achieved through new delimitation of text, the emphasis of capitalization combined with the unusual use of a single negative in a syntactically affirmative sentence, transform the last two stanzas (so far a testimony to a "thwarted act of seeing") into "an account of it, an account of a remarkable vision" of something that is not / does not exist (Skrendo 138).<sup>21</sup>

Eponymous doors is one of Różewicz's figures of passage. The themes of bridge, gate (the poem "brama") or gates, as in the moving "The Gates of Death (to the memory of Henryk Bereska)" are also inscribed in this symbolic of transition. These figures are usually negated, however, devoid of symbolic meaning as a result of loss of a connection to the ritual. Transition no longer entails a change of ontological status of the person experiencing it, nor does it entail access to the transcendental dimension, to something radically different. A "spatial passage" does not become a "spiritual passage."<sup>22</sup> The Gates of Death in the title do not designate a clearly defined and reliably localized ontological border. It turns out that life itself is a ceaseless, painful squeezing through the invisible door, as death is its immanent part:

The gates of death  
The secret of their construction  
is that the gates are not there  
an at the same time they are  
wide open to all  
they are so narrow  
that they must be squeezed through  
in the sweat of one's brow  
in bloody labor  
for years on end squealing  
or screaming in fear  
(Różewicz 2011 253)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 198-199. The version printed in [P2] is the one we know from *Face*: „trochę w lewo / albo w środku // nic / nie widzę” (P2 324) [emphasis mine, PP], semantically most divergent from the version in *Mother departs*. [Due to syntactical differences between English and Polish, translation proposed by Czerniawski (Różewicz 1994 145) “a little to the left / or in the centre// I see/ nothing” erases some of the syntactical oddity mentioned by the author further in the essay. In this particular case “I don’t see/ anything” appears to be closer translation of the version in *Faces*. Paradoxically “I see/ nothing” when translated literally to Polish results in “Widzę / Nic,” the syntactically unusual construction discussed above. PP]

<sup>21</sup> Skrendo, A. *Tadeusz Różewicz...* 138.

<sup>22</sup> See: A. van Gennep *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii*. [The Rites of Passage] Translated by B. Biały, introduction J. Tokarska-Bakir, PIW, Warszawa: 2006, especially chapter: “Przejście fizyczne” [The Territorial Passage].

Of the two poetics of funeral texts distinguished by Antonina Lubaszewska, those written “against the death of the text” or for the “death of the text,” I am particularly interested in the latter strategy (Lubaszewska 588, 586, 577).<sup>23</sup> I understand the “death of the text” here as a process in which the text becomes an equivalent to lethal “process of disappearance.” The purpose of writing is, paradoxically, the pursuit of “absolute visual silence,” hence the elimination of the verb (means of dynamizing the work), nullification of metaphor, fragmentation, silences and evasions. In order to “narrate death through the great Nothing of the text,” it is reduced to white space, a blank sheet of paper (Lubaszewska 581, 580, 579). An image of death becomes the death of an image, as in the poem \*\*\* In memory of Konstancy Puzyna.<sup>24</sup> Spaces between the lines here acquire in this case the same semantic status as actual the lines, and even begin to dominate; the gradual reduction of the lexicon leads to a tautology, a complete decay of language and meaning: “so that’s/ all/ mummy// yes sonny/ that’s all/ and nothing more/ nothing more/ so that’s all of life/ yes that’s all” (Różewicz 1994 257). “The death of the text” in Różewicz’s funeral poems seems to correspond to a specific way of experiencing death as dissolution, “crumbling,” erosion.

“Death in the text” on the other hand is not so much a “subject” or “theme” of the work, but rather a kind of internalized, though inexpressible and directly unrepresentable, though inscribed in the text, silence, absence, or lack. Although death is pure negativity and indeterminacy, a “death of experience and the impossibility of an image,” it can be captured only in the form of substantiated and concretized representations. It turns out, however, to be “the most empty image, since the obstacle which separates us from its subject is impossible to overcome,”<sup>25</sup> the most definite obstacle of all. Death is therefore always represented by “something else,” and the verbal or visual substitute surrounds the inner void, because “the thought of death is outside, that is, it cannot be taken by death itself” (Lubaszewska 579).<sup>26</sup> What is significant, Różewicz rarely refers to its personifying figures, the most traditional of thanatic symbols, which “anthropomorphize that which is non-human” (Mikołajko

<sup>23</sup> Poetics, in which “death in the text is against the death of the texts,” in the case of texts dedicated to late writers and poets, is realized as dynamization and internal dialogization of the text by use of quotations, allusions and paraphrases of their works. Its goal is to “complement the work of the deceased,” as it becomes not only an expression of mourning, but also an attempt to keep alive the memory and the “interpretation of one’s way of existence, the existence through one’s work” (A. Lubaszewska, *Śmierć w tekście – przeciw śmierci tekstu*, „Ruch Literacki” 1996 Vol. 5, 588, 586, 577.)

<sup>24</sup> In this case the disappearance is literal: when we compare the manuscript to the printed work we can observe consistent reduction of forms of expression and proliferation of the whiteness of the blank page. Cf. Pl. 18-19.

<sup>25</sup> Lefebvre, M.- J. *Limage fascinante et le surréel*. qtd. in M. Guiomar. *Zasady estetyki śmierci* (transl. T. Swoboda). *Wymiary śmierci*, ed. S. Rosiek. słowo/obraz terytoria: Gdańsk. 2002. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Lubaszewska, A. *Śmierć w tekście – przeciw śmierci tekstu*, „Ruch Literacki” 1996 Vol. 5. 579

51).<sup>27</sup> Driven by the "imperative to express pure negativity," the author of *Monuments* creates forms which are rather inverted, hollow, double-negated (Kunz 117).<sup>28</sup> One such "negative strategy" of representation seems to be the theme of the "silent seed" and the "inner poem."

Dying of loved ones is thus experienced by the poet as a depletion of existence, the ontic weakening of reality. The posthumous "Nothing" is a penetrating force, breaking up existence from the inside: "The space where I live is diminished not only by the passing of the years of my life, but also by the faces of those who leave. At first going away slowly, reluctantly, one at a time, then faster, more numerous, almost en masse. Sometimes it seems to me that I'm floating on an ice floe. Its surface cracks, becomes ever smaller" ("Identity (memory of Karol Kuryluk)," Pr3 78). This experience translates into the use of "narrative archetype of death," "one of the anthropological structures of imagination, constituted by the image of breaking, tearing...extraction, separation, farewell, departure, disappearance, transitions, distance ...." In this way, death as a theme begins to appear to be "one of the semiotic-narrative structures," involving the collapse of syntactic and logical coherence of the text by means of disjunction of the relation between "subject P and an object O that is life" (Lubaszewska 577-8).<sup>29</sup> Its equivalent on the level of poetic imaging become the themes are loss, degradation and erosion: "I feel tired. Constantly crumbling. Something is crumbling, collapsing." (M 99) notes Różewicz in *Dziennik gliwicki* [Gliwice diary], written during the illness and death of his mother. Similarly in "That Rustle...":

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<sup>27</sup> Mikolejko, Z. „Kilka słów u umarłej” in *Śmierć i tekst. Sytuacja ostateczna w perspektywie słowa. słowo/obraz terytorii*: Gdańsk. 2001. 51. Of particular significance here is the poem "Der Tod ist ein Meister..." in which death is personified in a double fashion: as a "female" ("beautiful Stranger") and a "male" ("ein Meister") figure. *La mort*, Celan's suicidal death in the waters of the Seine is a personification of death which does not deprive one of their face and name, nor strips the intimate encounter of its mystery. The poet refers to the phantasm of the Great Mother in the metonymic phrase: "open womb / of river / death's oblivion" (P3 271). *Der Tod*, on the other hand, means the dehumanized mass extermination in death camps. The unrepresentable taboo of the Shoah is only suggested by the allegory of the "master from Germany" from Celan's *Todesfuge* (which is a dual mediatization emphasizing the impossibility of direct representation). According to Jean-Luc Nancy, the Holocaust is the event in the history of the West and its culture, after which a figural representation of death from the perspective of life, one understood as *hypotyposis*, total and self-absorbed "presence made present," is no longer possible. "Death, as inappropriate property of existence, which is called finite in the sense of fullness, in its unity and integrity or indispensability, in its being-in-the-world, was 'stolen'... As a result one cannot come into the story of life for which it would provide access, i.e. entry and exit, an opening" See also *Zakazana reprezentacja*, (trans. A. Dziadek), "Teksty Drugie" 2004. Vol. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Kunz, T. *Strategie negatywne...* 117.

<sup>29</sup> Lubaszewska, A. *Śmierć w tekście – przeciw śmierci tekstu*, „Ruch Literacki” 1996 Vol. 5. 579, 577-578.

That rustle  
life pouring  
from a world full of objects  
into death  
it's through me  
like a hole  
in reality  
this world pushes through  
into the next

(SP 237)

“Nothing” is no longer a radical antithesis of “something,” it seems rather a destructive force, ever present within reality. There is a continuous osmosis between the two, “death is no longer a limit which crowns a busy life; death is an internal vacuum, which dilutes the density of becoming, a meontic component diminishing the ontic substance of life” (Jankélévitch 344-5).<sup>30</sup> Life is thus still present in the posthumous void – as a trace.

At this point, I should clarify the categories of form and emptiness which are used here. I define form, following Ewa Rewers’ understanding, as “contribution of the mind to the object of study. Thanks to form, a mind can perceive and comprehend an experience in a unique and specific way. Experience is thus the opposite of form understood as such” (Rewers 309).<sup>31</sup> As emptiness I understand something ontologically indeterminate, a liminal space between being and not being. I refer to Plato, who defined this space as “admitting not of destruction,” an undifferentiated ground “providing a seat for all that has birth,” which “should be outside of all forms” (Plato 82, 84).<sup>32</sup> Thus understood, emptiness is amorphous and invisible, and as a consequence, unimaginable and inexpressible. Emmanuel Levinas seems to refer to this tradition of thought when he writes:

Let us imagine all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness.” What remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not something, but the fact that there is [il y a].” The absence of everything returns as a presence, as the place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void, or the murmur of silence. There is, after this destruction of things and beings, the impersonal “field of forces” of existing... Existing returns no matter with what negation one dismisses it. There is, as the irremissibility of pure existing.

(Levinas 46-7)<sup>33</sup>

Levinas considers the possibility of “being without nothingness, which leaves no hole and permits no escape,” when death refers to loss of corporeality and subjec-

<sup>30</sup> Jankélévitch, V. “Quoddité” jest niezniszczalna. Nieodwołalność nieodwracalności.” (trans. M. Jastrzębiec-Mosakowski). *Wymiary śmierci*. 344-345.

<sup>31</sup> Rewers, E. *Pustka i forma...* . 309.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, and Peter Kalkavage. *Plato's Timaeus: Translation, Glossary, Appendices and Introductory Essay*. Newburyport, MA: Focus Pub./R. Pullins, 2001. 82, 84/

<sup>33</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 1987. 46-47.

tivity, dissolution in pure, undifferentiated existence, but it cannot be a complete annihilation of being (Lévinas 50).

“Nothing” does not mean nothingness then, but rather the empty “space left after something,” a loss, “an acute trace of absence” which, “like a stigma, or a chronic wound, continuously focuses attention and leaves long-term effects – paradoxically proving the persistence of being of that which does not exist,” which is past and is no longer perceptible in ordinary experience, but remains surprisingly indestructible (Nycz 107).<sup>34</sup> The dead are paradoxically present as an absence, persist in the language of the living, but as silence, in memory – as silent faces. Their ontological status is impossible to define, they cannot be said to exist, but simultaneously one cannot determine their irreversible disappearance. The “Shadow” that appears in the poem “\*\*\*” (I waded through the dream...), exists neither in a dream nor the waking world, it is “something” in many ways unstable, something located on the border – or perhaps even itself being the border, the name for its experience...it is like a trace of being impressed on non-being, a circle on the surface of nothingness” (Skrendo 151).<sup>35</sup> “Nothing” as “space left after something” retains the remnant of “something”:

an empty room

empty?  
but I am in it

I am I write  
I listen to the silence

on the pillow the hollow  
left by your head  
being filled  
being smoother  
by time

(Różewicz 2011 187)

According to Lévinas a trace is something outside the order of reality, something which disrupts its temporal and ontological homogeneity. “He who left traces in wiping out his traces did not mean to say or do anything by the traces he left. He disturbed the order in an irreparable way. He has passed absolutely” (Lévinas 104).<sup>36</sup> Blind and unreadable trace is neither a sign (*semion*), a cipher left to decode, nor a clear material impression material (*typos*) of the source entity. It is rather an indelible, but hardly identifiable remnant (*ichnos*), in which absence gains an advantage

<sup>34</sup> Nycz, R. „Tajemnica okaleczonej poezji. Trzy głosy do twórczości Tadeusza Różewicza.” In: *Zobaczyć poetę*, ed. E. Guderian-Czaplińska, E. Kalemba-Kasprzak, WiS, Poznań: 1993. 107.

<sup>35</sup> Skrendo, A. *Tadeusz Różewicz...* 151.

<sup>36</sup> Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Collected Philosophical Papers of Emmanuel Levinas ; Translated by Alphonso Lingis*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: M. Nijhoff, 1986. 104.

over presence. A trace of being is “something indestructible,” which remains after existence and what death cannot completely erase (Jankélévitch 352).<sup>37</sup>

Death destroys the whole of a living being, but it cannot destroy the fact that they lived; death turns to ashes and dust the psychosomatic human architecture, but *quoddité* of lived life still exists in these ruins; everything that belongs to the nature of being is perishable, that is it exposes this being in different ways to decay, dissolution, decomposition; only this invisible, intangible, simple and metaphysical *je-ne-sais-quoi* that we call *quoddité*, escapes annihilation.

(Jankélévitch 352)

These traces, when embedded in the memory and consciousness of the living, transform their mental space into posthumous space, where the dead not so much persist as static, reified images, but actually “live.” They are granted the attributes of presence and vitality: “The dead are still with me. I see them alive. They perform a gesture, their faces...They are as present as the living. But my ties with them are somehow stronger than with the living. Death. Locked in my memory” (Pages torn from “Gliwice diary,” Pr3, 317).

Despite being an inalienable part of the world of the living, the dead are silent. They are able to perform movements and gestures, their faces are clear and able to express, but the “life” they lead in the space of memory is a silent life. Communication with them is always an illusory communication, a monologue or prosopopoeia: “I sit on the bench, and talk to Staff and Przyboś. The dead are silent, and I tell them what has happened to me since they left...Staff is smiling...I remember that smile, youthful, “roguish” even. I remember that smile.” (Tale of Staff, Tuwim and the Roses... Pr3, p 52-53).

In Różewicz’s poetry the concepts of non-being and diminishing as internalized and indelibly present components of existence are also illustrated by the theme of “silent seed”: “Oh how it sprouts and grows in me/ the silent seed/ of dead fruit/ rises to the light/ punctures the blind clay/ of my body/ breaks wooden tongue” (P1 364). It is a shocking image of a living human body becoming a tomb; one of Różewicz’s visions of “afterlife”: “my mother was walking towards me/ Don’t be afraid, I said, you are in the ground/ no one can harm you, hurt you, touch you...you are in me no one can touch you/ humiliate you hurt you” (M, 69, emphasis mine – H.M.).

As an interiorized “empty signifier functioning without phenomenal subject...a presence, which refers to the absence,” the dead exist in the body and the consciousness of man, disintegrating them by placing them on the border between life and death (Thomas 43).<sup>38</sup> They are the source of excruciating memory, painful like a thorn: “I am the pit full of memories/ one on top of another” (P1 280), “I house the dead/ it is where they found/ the last refuge” (P2 209) . Death is an integral part

<sup>37</sup> Jankélévitch, V. “Quoddité” jest niezniszczalna. Nieodwołalność nieodwracalności.” (trans. M. Jastrzębiec-Mosakowski). *Wymiary śmierci*. 352.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, Louis-Vincent. *Trup. Od biologii do antropologii*. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie: Łódź. 1991. 43.

of life, indispensable emptiness inside the fullness: "death in the living me/ dug corridors/ screaming inside me/ like an abandoned cave/ full of bones" (P3 244). The textual equivalent of internalized lack is the speech "broken and marked by the wound of silence" hiding the unspeakable: "When the light falls/ on my poem/ I see death in it/ a black grain/ of ergot/ in a golden head of wheat/ which drifts off/ beyond the horizon" (Żukowski 150; Różewicz 2011 162).<sup>39</sup>

The "silent grain" is also a silent "inner poem," the proper core of poetry, hidden beneath the words of "external" poem<sup>40</sup>. This motif, obsessively recurring in Różewicz's writing starting from "Posłowie do poematu" [Afterword to the poem] finds its most compelling articulation in a series of paradoxical "unwritten" poems about the "implosion of poetry,"<sup>41</sup> such as: "\*\*\*\*" ("I tried to remember..."), "A Poem" ("I wanted to describe..."), "\*\*\*\*" ("poetry doesn't always..."), "now." They are the records of aporetic gestures of placing and (simultaneously) removing the mark, word-traces of the dissolution of words. "Afterword to the poem," a metapoetic appendix to the poem "Na powierzchni i w środku" [On the surface and inside], is a development of the poem originally sketched in the essay *Zamknięcie* [Closure], dedicated to the memory of Zdzisław Hierowski:

There are  
inner poems  
and outer poems  
there are poems  
tangible full sensual  
which enfold the others  
secret and empty  
like peel and pulp  
enfolding and hiding  
the seed  
the grain  
"Closure" (Pr3, 97)

Slow and careful  
you must take off the words  
strip image of image  
strip shapes of colors  
images of feelings  
to the core  
to the language of suffering  
to death

"Afterword to the poem" (P3 108-109)

In the commentary to the sketch Różewicz ponders how "to bring out from the depths and to the surface" the silent, hidden "inner poem." The act of uncovering

<sup>39</sup> Żukowski, T., *Zagłada a język poetycki Tadeusza Różewicza*. In: *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady*, ed. A. Brodzka-Wald, D. Krawczyńska, J. Leociak, ŻIH: Warszawa 2000. 150.

<sup>40</sup> This difference is crucial to the poet. See "Afterword..."

<sup>41</sup> *O implozji poezji*, A. Czerniawski's conversation with T. Różewicz, „Poezja” 1989. Vol. 2. 10.

is an experience of crippling tear, almost physical disintegration, when that which is “secret and empty” and absolutely negative, “rips off the coating of realized poem and comes out into the light with blood and water” (Pr3, 98). The inexpressible “core” of the text is compared to the elusive (non)presence of the dead in the memories of the living: “This is how the dead hide behind my memories and how Zdzisław is hiding behind these words. I cannot reveal him. He is there, behind a thick curtain, behind the veil. I can not reveal it, because I know that he is not there, that I will not find him” (Pr3, 98). In this instance, death is an impassable barrier to life; it makes it impossible to journey to the world of the dead, whether through memory of imagination, and to express what is not in the language of what is.

The core of poetry, the “actual tragedy unfolding inside the poem” (Pr3, 152) turns out to be the tragic inability to express – in terms of presence and the language of life experience – the non-experience of an event “not meant”<sup>42</sup> for a living person (Cichowicz 8). Poetry ‘about’ death cannot present any experience, because “that which ‘begets’ the poem...is precisely what hasn’t taken place, occurred, nor happened in the individual event, to which the poem refers, without describing it” (Lacoue-Labarthe 28).<sup>43</sup> Death, “ostentatious, yet incomprehensible, transparent, but unreadable, complete, and at the same time representing absence, belongs to non-verbal events” (Czaplinski 9),<sup>44</sup> and thus cannot adequately made present in the language. It is the destruction and deprivation of language, a vulnerability in discourse, “a monosyllable, unpronounceable, which can’t be named or confessed.”<sup>45</sup>

In “Gliwice diary” the poet helplessly watches as his mother’s dying becomes the process of losing the language, a gradual deprivation of the semiotic universe. Words are used only to communicate (?) physical pain, while thought and language are reduced “to the language of suffering/ to death.”

Mother speaks less and less, says fewer words, as if she were losing them. Sometimes she mutters, mumbles especially after waking up. Most frequently repeated words are: “air, water, burns, hurts.” She communicates with looks and signs..The baby’s gibberish will be shaped into the words of life – the babble of those going away is a diminishing, decay and dissolution of words, leading to the final silence. (M 107).

Can something that has death as its constitutive meontic “core” be a salvation from death? The poetic word is a mortal word, not only due to the lack of a sacred archetype, but also because it “designates” death and, as such, is the lack of words. And yet, the omnipotent mortality, while leading to the erosion of language and paralysis

<sup>42</sup> Cichowicz, S. *Śmierć: gwałt na idei lub reakcja życia. Wstęp Antropologia śmierci. Mysł francuska*, trans. S. Cichowicz, J.M. Godzimirski. PIW: Warszawa 1993. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe, P. *Poetry as Experience*, trans. A. Tarnowski. Stanford University Press: Stanford Cal. 2004. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Czaplinski, P. *Szczeliny śmierci. Mikrologi ze śmiercią. Motywy tanatyczne we współczesnej literaturze polskiej*, „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literaturoznawcza”: 2001. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ariès, P., „Śmierć odwrócona.” trans. J. M. Godzimirski, In: *Antropologia śmierci...* 243.

of imagination, at the same time "*stimulates the evolution of consciousness* of the subject. Paradoxically, therefore, it can be said that Różewicz's poetry grows, continues – thanks to obsession with dying. Death keeps this poetry alive" (Legeżyńska 129).<sup>46</sup>

Understood both literally and metaphorically, the multi-dimensional experience of death becomes the archetype of the poet's various experiences of liminality. Conversely, the liminal experience is in Różewicz's poetic anthropology usually an experience of death, and more precisely, a traumatic "experience of disintegration – dissolution of matter, annihilation of "real" reality, destruction and scattering of meaning" (Nycz 200).<sup>47</sup> At the same time, however, the death is to the poet a paradigmatic and fundamental experience of "the prior, and only reality" (Stankowska 122).<sup>48</sup> In a degraded and aesthetically anesthetized world where not only the value of experience, but its very category has disappeared,<sup>49</sup> and where death was rejected and made meaningless because it "is only the negation life and cannot be accompanied by anything more than an empty denial of life" (Barański 45),<sup>50</sup> the experience of universal mortality and inevitable disappearance may become the only form of authentic experience of reality.<sup>51</sup>

The unusual frequency of imagery associated with stone, sculptures and monuments is typical of Różewicz's funeral texts, as he often compared writing of funeral poetry to putting up tombstones, engraving epitaphs, or carving cemetery monuments. In "Closure" he writes: "The graveyard of poems is growing, poetic tombstones for the dead. They grow next to one another like fresh graves" (Pr3, 96). In "...Zraniony poeta" [...Wounded poet], memories of the dead are called "tombstone inscriptions." "I have buried too many loved ones, friends and acquaintances, too many enemies... Memories as grave stones rest on my mind, my emotions," he says (Pr3, 386).

<sup>46</sup> Legeżyńska, A. „Gest pożegnania. Szkice o poetyckiej świadomości elegijno-ironicznej,” „Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literaturoznawcza” 1999. 129.

<sup>47</sup> Nycz, R. „Tadeusza Różewicza....” 200.

<sup>48</sup> Stankowska, A. „Inne stany arcy Poezji” *Kwartalnik Artystyczny*. 2006 Vol. 2. 122.

<sup>49</sup> Tokarska-Bakir, J. „Zanik doświadczenia: diagnoza antropologiczna.” In: *Nowoczesność jako doświadczenie*, ed. R. Nycz, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Universitas, Kraków: 2006.

According to the author rituals are "tools to ensure the continuity of experience" („Przemiany,” in: A. van Gennep *Obrzędy przejścia* 13), and the modern suspicion of ritual is one of the causes of "loss of experience," loss of a sense of continuity and the possibility of identifying with the experience of ancestors and others. Contemporary death is de-ritualized, not experienced by the community, prohibited. "The "indecent" drama of natural death" is not culturally processed, but repressed and tabooed (M. di Nola *Triumf śmierci. Antropologia żałoby*, ed. M. Woźniak, trans. J. Kornecka et al. Universitas, Kraków: 2006. 100.)

<sup>50</sup> Barański, J. „Anestetyzacja tanatyczna, czyli o strategii ponowoczesnej kultury wobec śmierci,” In: *Tanatos. Problemy współczesnej tanatologii*. Vol. 7. ed. J. Kolbuszewski. WTN, Wrocław: 2003. 45.

<sup>51</sup> Writing about the experience of death, I mean only the death of another human being. Death of "oneself" abolishes, along with subjectivity, the category of experience.

Różewicz's epitaph is in my opinion a variation of the monument topos. If we consider the monument to be the fundamental commemorative formula for the poet, connected with the problem of "the shape of memory," as well as a kind of prototype for the "negative strategies" of presentation and an emblem for the inexpressibility of experience<sup>52</sup>, the epitaph is an almost exemplary implementation of the concept. Writing about Różewicz's poetic tombstones, I therefore have in mind rather the multifaceted relationships of his funeral and commemorative poems with so understood monument topos, than references to formal aspects of traditionally understood antique or old Polish epitaphs.

However, in the sketch entitled "Mój wiersz" [My poem], the author's interpretation of "Chiaroscuro," we find references to Kochanowski's "Laments," to the tradition of "Renaissance tombs and Baroque graves and gravestones" (Różewicz 66).<sup>53</sup> In the poem itself the clear allusion would be the line "sea carved out/ of black stone" (P3 244), a "baroque" periphrasis of death. Różewicz criticizes the elaborate imagery, complains about the "hungry images" that obscured the "inner poem" and destroyed its original, concise (and most literal) version. The metaphor of overwhelming "gravestone" becomes a metapoetic description of the poem itself: "The poem, with its first nucleus, light and clear, was buried beneath the baroque gravestone...So more verses attached to the first crude structure, as if to the wall of death someone added a baroque tomb" (Różewicz 66-7). Thus we can observe a very clear division between the naked "wall of death" and the added "tomb," between the "core" of the poem, which is "black grain of ergot, as an image of illness and death," and its verbal and visual representation. Between what is horrifyingly real and asemantic and the added order of signs (Różewicz 67).

Jean-Didier Urbain calls this ambivalent combination of "sculpture" and "grave" a "liminal object," suspended between life and death, form and emptiness, a semiotic space established by the living (sculpture) and a somatic space dominated by chaos and decay (sepulcher). Being an empty signifier, it simulates a performance of the "fullness of reference." It carefully "censors, conceals, camouflages" the original trauma of death and the terror of annihilation and reification (Urbain 314).<sup>54</sup>

What is negated by Subject is not the grave itself, but its alleged emptiness, its insignificance, its prevailing silence, the impenetrability of its darkness...The Funeral Object is a *signal* that there is no gaping void; it gives meaning to the absurd, tells about the life after death, and makes death the beginning of the second existence (because that which we can tell about must exist!). Thanks to the imaginary relationship between the visible and the invisible, between signifier and signified, the Object transcends; everything becomes endowed with meaning: Object as well as death. (Urbain 321)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> I write about this in my text "Tadeusza Różewicza architektonika doświadczenia" („Wielogłos," 2007 /1)

<sup>53</sup> Różewicz, T. „Mój wiersz." *Odra*. 1984. Vol. 3. 66.

<sup>54</sup> Urbain, J.-D. „Rzeźba/Grób: przedmiot graniczny." trans. M.L. Kalinowski, In: *Wymiary śmierci...* 314.

<sup>55</sup> Urbain, J.-D. „W stronę historii Przedmiotu Funeralnego." trans. M.L. Kalinowski, In: *Wymiary śmierci...* 321.

It is both a material object placed in the physical space and perceivable by senses and a psychological border, a division between the conceivable and representable and that which paralyzes the possibility of conceptualization and representation. "Being impenetrable, it prohibits, censors, separates and conceals something; it divides the world in two, doubling it, because it locates itself between reality and the world of imagination. The authentic perception of "the world of the dead" ends where the Object stops; that is where the world of imagination is realized, and where a myth is born" (Urbain 313-4).<sup>56</sup> Being an opaque cognitive obstacle and a sign of "the fundamental impermeability and secrecy," a "liminal object" implies at the same time the possibility of transgression through an act of imaginative contemplation: "To contemplate a Funeral Object is to inhabit it, to undergo a sort of petrification, to meld with it and become one, to penetrate inside it and to discover there the undisturbed life of the dead and participate in it for a moment; it is to make this the object an emblem of mysterious and prolonged life after death – to live with it" (Urbain 314).<sup>57</sup>

Such "petrified" imagination<sup>58</sup> moving beyond its condition – life – and constructing a "tomb" of its own forms, representations and signs, upon the emptiness, must be aware of the fundamental ambiguity of this transgression. It is not only about crossing ontological and epistemological border, but also ethical one – the limit of appropriateness.

And thus, once again, Różewicz's poetry, which begins by emphasizing its weaknesses and inabilities, and stressing that it "doesn't explain anything" or "doesn't fulfill hopes" (P2 421), turns out to be a fascinating "poetry of poetry" – a complex metapoetic reflection on the sense and possibilities of literature in the face of human experience.

*Translation: Paweł Pyrka*

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<sup>56</sup> Urbain, J.-D. „Rzeźba/Grób: przedmiot graniczny.” trans. M.L. Kalinowski, In: *Wymiary śmierci...* 313-314. According to Mikołajko, the language of funeral texts, especially the epitaphs, is a mythical language that goes where *logos* refuses to go. "Speech is helpless in the face of that "pre-ontological experience," in which everything has its beginning and end...Only myth can reach that realm of non-being, which is bubbling with becoming and passing away, only myth can get to its apeiron, its endlessness" („Kilka słów u umarłej” 33) However, it seems that the language of myth is for Różewicz a negative reference, something impossible and inaccessible.

<sup>57</sup> Urbain, J.-D. „Rzeźba/Grób: przedmiot graniczny.” trans. M.L. Kalinowski, In: *Wymiary śmierci...* 314.

<sup>58</sup> There is an interesting similarity between this metaphor and Różewicz's autothematic expressions. In his texts we encounter such suggestive self-determination of the subject as: "I...A grey man with imagination / small, stonelike and inexorable" (P1 68), while the topoi of sculpture and monument are, next to physicality, an area upon which the poet draws most frequently in his poetic and metapoetic imaging.