Modes of Reading Texts, Objects, and Images: Late Poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the late oeuvre of Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-2014), a world-renowned Polish poet, dramatist, and prose writer. It focuses primarily on three poetic and multi-genre volumes published after the political turn of 1989, namely: *Mother Departs* (*Matka Odchodzi*) (1999), *professor’s knife* (*nożyk profesora*) (2001), and *Buy a Pig in a Poke: work in progress* (*Kup kota w worku: work in progress*) (2008). The abovementioned works are chosen as exemplars of the writer’s authorial strategies / modes of reading praxis, prescribed by Różewicz for his ideal audience. These strategies simultaneously reveal the poet himself as a reader (of his own texts and the works of other authors). This study defines an author’s late style as a response to the cognitive and aesthetic evaluation of one’s life’s work, artistic legacy, and metaphysical angst of mortality. Różewicz’s late works are characterized by a tension between recognition and reconciliation to closure, and difficulty with it and/or opposition to it. Authorial construction of lyrical subjectivity as a reader, and modes of textual construction are the central questions under analysis. This study examines both, Tadeusz Różewicz as a reader, and the authorial strategies/modes he creates to guide the reading praxis of the authorial audience. It argues that authorial self-consciousness and re-reading is a distinctive trait of Różewicz’s late style. More importantly, a key recurring motif in this author’s works is a conscious design of his ideal audience’s reading praxis via specific strategies of building readerly response. Reading texts, objects, and images, under the guise of multiplicity of voices and tones, Różewicz anxiously fights for his authorial voice and artistic legacy, but also for an ethical and engaged readerly response.
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Introduction

The initial impetus behind this dissertation emerged from my interest in the late style and works of a generation of Polish writers who came of age during WWII and whose careers were slowly drawing to a close in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Out of this generation, works of one poet in particular captured my attention. He has been called by critics a catastrophist, a nihilist, a collaborator, and an opportunist, even a moralist. However, what drew me to Tadeusz Różewicz’s oeuvre were not the controversies or scandals which periodically accompanied his career, but rather the power of his poetry in contrast to the simplicity of his “unpoetic” language and his atypical short verse. This poet was still fiercely publishing in his late 80s and 90s, remaining current, thoroughly aware of the latest literary and artistic trends, and actively engaged with contemporary issues and problems. Różewicz was also an obsessive reader and re-reader of his own texts and works of other authors. In my opinion, it is his constant returns to and re-reading of certain texts, problems, and motifs that define his late oeuvre. The problem of Różewicz as simultaneously an author and a reader has still not been fully explored in scholarship. This lack of attention is significant because only when we understand this author as a reader (of texts, biographies, objects, images) can we understand how Różewicz programs the reading praxis of his own texts for the audience, and in essence, uncover how he wants to be read. In order to address this problem, my dissertation outlines and examines Różewicz’s main modes of authorial reading and writing in his late oeuvre.

Situating this poet on the map of Polish postwar literature is not a simple task. Różewicz stands very much apart from easy classifications, literary groups, and currents. Born in 1921, he belonged to a generation of talented poets that included Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Tadeusz Gajcy, Andrzej Stroiński, all of whom died in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and Andrzej Trzebiński, who died as a result of public execution on the streets of Warsaw in 1943. Other writers of the same generation, such as Tadeusz Borowski and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, survived imprisonment (Borowski in Nazi concentration camps and Grudziński in the Soviet gulags). Both would later be known in the West primarily for the texts they wrote about their traumatic experiences of imprisonment.¹ Few others who also survived the war include such
great poets as Zbigniew Herbert, Miron Białoszewski, and Wisława Szymborska. This
generation, born in independent inter-war Poland and coming of age during World War II, in
which Poland lost six million people (approximately one-fifth of its population), is known in
Polish letters as “The Generation of the Columbuses.” It is the horrors of the experience of this
war that define Różewicz’s oeuvre.

One Polish literary critic, Kazmierz Wyka, famously labelled this generation of poets as a
“generation infected with death.”³ Różewicz contested this view, asserting that, on the contrary,
his generation was “infected with life.”⁴ Yet, Wyka had good reasons for his assertion, given
poems like “Survivor,” from Różewicz’s postwar debut volume, Anxiety (Niepokój, 1947), in
which he writes: “I am twenty-four / Led to slaughter / I survived. // These words are empty and
equivalent: / man and animal / love and hate / foe and friend / dark and light. // (…) I have seen:
truckloads of chopped–up people / who will never be saved.”⁵ Superficially, these verses are
about death, but note that what is being underscored is Różewicz as a survivor, and thus witness.
Simultaneously, the poet emphasizes the bankruptcy of language, and of ethics. In “Lament”
from the same volume, his lyrical subject asserts: “I am twenty / I am a murderer / I am a tool /
as blind as a sword / in the hands of an executioner / I have murdered a man.”⁶ Here he takes on
a position of responsibility and participation, which is famously echoed also by Borowski’s
narrator Vorarbeiter Tadek.⁷ Różewicz’s postwar poetry can be seen as an answer to Adorno’
dictum addressing the (im)/possibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz. Różewicz claims that
“It is precisely the poems written in Grenzsituationen,⁸ in ultimate situations, ‘prosaicized’
works, which created conditions for poetry’s subsistence and even survival.”⁹

Following the war, Różewicz did not ask about the sense of death and dying, but about the sense
of what remained after that moral catastrophe.¹⁰ Between the two tendencies of Polish postwar
poetry, the post avant-garde and the neoclassicist that Jan Błoński identified in his famous essay,
“Bieguny poezji,”¹¹ Różewicz follows Julian Przyboś (1901-1970) and belongs to the first.
Czesław Miłosz’s (1911-2004) poetry, in contrast, with its fairly traditional diction, serves as a
representative of the second. At the basis of the new poetics proposed by Różewicz lies an
“unpoeticization” of words, an “anti-poetry” of ascetic expression and drastic simplicity which
aimed to bear witness to a world emerging from trauma.¹² He rejected elaborate and ornamental
metaphors, intricate meters and rhyme, and showed a distrust of rhetoric and falseness. His free-verse style shows links to the tradition of the Polish Avant-garde school of poetry. Yet it also stands against it; unlike the fathers of the Avant-garde, Tadeusz Peiper and Julian Przyboś, Różewicz stayed away from “beautiful sentences” (“pięknych zdań”)\textsuperscript{13} and striking metaphors connecting vastly distant ideas in order to effect surprise,\textsuperscript{14} subscribing instead to Przyboś’s maxim of “minimum of words” (“najmniej słów”).\textsuperscript{15} He chose to remain separate and inevitably also positioned against the Avant-garde, since pre-war Avant-garde optimism, which put its trust in the new civilizational progress, was unthinkable after the war.

In the first half of the 1950s, Różewicz, for a few years, embraced Communism; in fact the persona of his lyrical subject from the period of Socialist Realism has been termed “the one who adapted” (“Przystosowany”).\textsuperscript{16} In five of the volumes he published during that time – \textit{Pięć poematów} (1950), \textit{Czas który idzie} (1951), \textit{Wiersze i obrazy} (1952), \textit{Równina} (1954) and \textit{Srebrny kłos} (1955) – his lyrical subject seems to have accepted current social and political changes and assessed the future with some optimism.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, even here, next to politically inspired texts, the poet still demonstrates a “double-consciousness,” as some works from these volumes, clearly still marked with post-war trauma, could have belonged to his earlier collections \textit{Niepokój} (1947) or \textit{Czerwona rękawiczka} (1948). Later, disillusioned with Communist ideology, Różewicz gave it up, and throughout the rest of his career remained steadfastly apolitical, alert and hypersensitive to the lies of officialdom.

When in 1956 the doctrine of socialist realism fell, literature and art regained some of its independence. Różewicz’s generation can be seen in relief next to the work of a younger formation of poets debuting at that time, known as “Generation 1956”. These writers (Andrzej Bursa, Tadeusz Nowak, Stanisław Grochowiak, Jerzy Harasymowicz, Stanisław Czycz, Bohdan Drozdowski, Ernest Bryll, Urszula Kozioł, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz) born in the 1930s were only children during the war. Moreover, Stalinism was not a defining experience in their lives. They were thus entering the literary stage, as if it were devoid of the experience with traumatic history of Różewicz’s generation, and consequently, as Stanisław Burkot claims, had problems asserting a coherent identity of their own.\textsuperscript{18} The critic also asserts that this group wanted to engage in a dialogue with Polish literary tradition (starting from the Middle Ages, through the
Baroque and Romantic periods, reaching right up to the 1920s and the use of the grotesque) and their dialogue was based on stylization, paraphrase and parody.\textsuperscript{19} Burkot helps us understand that the goal of Różewicz’s generation, by contrast, was to re-define, in different ways, the role of art, of poetry and language, in a post-war reality. Różewicz sought to discard all ornamentation in poetry, wanting to return to a language that was bare and direct. Miron Białoszewski and Tymoteusz Karpowicz, key figures in the linguistic current of Polish poetry, focused on language as a phenomenological tool. Wisława Szymborska probed reality by means of asking questions about it in her poetry. Herbert, on the other hand, rejected avant-garde illusions and advocated a return to tradition and elementary values of antiquity, of biblical tradition, of Renaissance culture. He had equipped himself with the tool of irony against the absurdity of contemporary times.\textsuperscript{20}

Różewicz has always been a stubborn outsider, remaining autonomous and writing from the margins. He did not belong to literary groups, ridiculed the idea of the poet as a prophet, and steered clear of the center of literary life in Warsaw. Immediately after the war he briefly resided in Kraków, later on living in the small city of Upper Silesia, Gliwice, and then moving on to Wrocław. Still, in his late poems, he defined himself as a “poet from Radomsko” – the small town in central Poland where he was born. Yet, this poet is no country bumpkin. Erudite, he travelled extensively, spending countless hours in the world’s best museums, attending literary events, conversing with world-class writers, meeting his translators.

Różewicz’s poetic volumes from the 1960s\textsuperscript{21} bring to the fore some of his most famous motifs: the lyrical subject in the role of an “Anonymous man” (\textit{Anonim}), and his all- encompassing, yet aggressive “Nothing” (\textit{Nic}). Again, Burkot's analysis proves helpful in the summary of the changes in Różewicz's views and poetics.\textsuperscript{22} Although still referring to the traumas of the first postwar volumes, the texts from this time period diagnose the consequences of the moral catastrophe of WWII on the collective consciousness and detect the changes to it effected by contemporary civilization. Looking critically at the contemporary world, Różewicz questions the metaphysical aspect of our being, and concludes that it is rather biology and instinct that comprise its foundations. Yet, he does not call on philosophical systems to arrive at these conclusions; he makes this diagnosis based on everyday situations, from behaviours he observes
at the grocery store, on the street, on the train, etc. Here, he remains consistent with his poetics – it is bare language derived from everyday reality that comprises this poet’s style. In the 1960s, Różewicz was already ahead of his time: when Poland was fashioning its economics on the Soviet model, he wrote about the impacts of mass culture and consumerism. The lyrical subject, under the guise of an Anonym, thus “everyman,” is shown as a manipulated product caught within the crisis of values in a contemporary civilization governed by the emptiness of “Nothing”. Różewicz contends that beauty as the foundation of art is no longer available; consequently he creates “dirty poems,” poetry which reflects everyday reality. Noise, fragmentary information from daily newspapers, advertisements, voices heard on TV and radio, enter his poetry. These motifs will return in his texts in the 1990s. A similar condition of confused existence within chaos afflicts the heroes of Różewicz’s drama at the time. Frequently nameless, inactive and unengaged (they lie in bed, sit with their backs turned to each other), they are anti-heroes, caught within the paradoxes and absurdity of contemporary times.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Różewicz’s poetry can be seen against the backdrop of yet another newly debuting generation of poets called Generation 1968, or the New Wave (Nowa Fala). These writers wanted literature to speak about reality directly, without the use of allusions, and without passing things over in silence. Two texts comprising their programme, The Unrepresented World (Świat nieprzedstawiony, 1974), co-authored by Adam Zagajewski and Julian Kornhauser, and Stanisław Barańczak’s The Distrustful and the Self-righteous (Nieufni i zadufani, 1971), stood for engaged poetry of thought and demonstrated a belief that literature can change reality. The New Wave poets opposed the work of Generation ’56, protesting the fact that they did not engage the reality of the 60s and 70s truthfully and courageously, and thus did not adequately oppose the political-propagandist newspeak of the times. Within the New Wave, the neo-linguistic poets, such as Ryszard Krynicki and Barańczak reached to the prewar Kraków Avant-garde in their attempts to present a new language in poetry. Their distrust of language stemmed from the realization that the institutionalized jargon of mass media impairs critical and independent thinking. By contrast, although politically unengaged, a whole decade earlier, in 1962 Różewicz wrote: “Taught human speech / Caliban the slave / awaits // mug in dung / feet in paradise / he sniff's a human / awaits // nothing arrives / nothing in magic robes / Prospero’s
robes / nothing from streets and lips / from pulpits and towers / nothing from loudspeakers /
speaks to nothing / about nothing // nothing begets nothing / nothing brings up nothing / nothing
awaits nothing / nothing threatens / nothing sentences / nothing pardons.”26 By the time the New
Wave had arrived on the literary scene, Różewicz had already decried the enslaving power of
newspeak and moved on.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, after the fall of communism and beyond, the
character of Polish poetry was once again largely determined by the older poets of Różewicz’s
generation. It is not without significance that within the scope of 16 years, two Polish poets
received Nobel prizes (Czesław Miłosz in 1980 and Wisława Szymborska in 1996); and that
meanwhile, Herbert and Różewicz were still actively publishing.27 Różewicz took a two decade
break from poetry after the 1969 collection Regio, returning only in 1991 with the publication of
Bas-Relief (Płaskorzeźba), but publishing his experimental dramatic works in the meantime. This
volume opened a new phase in his poetry. Critics noted a change in language: earlier, his verse
had been characterized by declarative sentences and specific judgements, whereas now he
relativized his evaluations.28 A dialogic nature is the main characteristic of this late phase of his
poetry: he cites and parodies the texts, expressions, statements of others; he returns to his own
earlier texts, and converses with sundry works of art and their artists. Finally, he engages in a
dialogue both with the past and with contemporary mass culture. Różewicz saw mass culture as
comprised of stereotypes, political propaganda, and commercial advertisements, all of which
proclaim false “truths,” which in turn muddle the very concept of truth. This last phase of
Różewicz’s oeuvre shows that art exists as fragments which can be recycled and reused. In his
late volumes: always a fragment (zawsze fragment, 1996) and always a fragment: recycling
(zawsze fragment: recycling, 1998), but also in Kup kota w worku (2008), he returns to the
diagnosis of culture that he made in the late 1960s. The prognoses from four decades ago still
hold true. In 1969, in his play The old woman broods (Stara kobieta wysiaduje), an old woman,
who may be seen as a symbol of our civilization and a continuity of values, gives birth to a
global garbage dump. Moral emptiness, and dehumanization, among the overwhelming garbage
of excess are the threats of contemporary mass culture.
The more Różewicz was becoming a lonely figure on the scene of Polish literature, and simultaneously was getting a poorer reception as he was less well understood in the swiftly changing contexts, the stronger was the development of his world-wide career, receiving, for example, a motion for the nomination for the Nobel prize from outside of Poland, championed by Professor of Slavonic Languages, Józef Trypućko (1910-1983), of Uppsala University. The poet’s critical reception throughout the course of his career oscillated between great successes and equally deep failures, and finally also periods of indifference and neglect. I came to be a reader of Różewicz’s and wrote my dissertation about him while he was still alive and continuously actively publishing new poetic volumes; now, I am editing this study at a time when with his death his oeuvre has come to a close. This finitude is expectedly sad, and suddenly very intimidating. Shortly after Różewicz’s death, the critic Andrzej Franaszek said, “with the death of Tadeusz Różewicz, we painfully experience a certain chapter of poetry closing ([ś]mierci Tadeusza Różewicza towarzyszy bolesne poczucie domykania się rozdziału poezji.). He was the last one of his generation. Poland’s Minister of Culture, Bogdan Zdrojewski said of the poet: „A Giant... A Nobel winner, without the Nobel Prize.” („Zmarł Gigant. Nobilista bez nobla.”)

Overview of Criticism

Over the past two decades volumes of literary criticism have been written about Różewicz. I aim to provide a general overview of the main trends on this critical landscape, and discuss only the key texts that have had an impact on my consideration of Różewicz’s late works. In the last twenty years, critics have focused on Różewicz’s oeuvre and his poetics in relation to trauma (Ryszard Nycz, Zbigniew Majchrowski). Some have read it in relation to specific categories of trauma: trauma as transgression in the case of Andrzej Skrendo, for example; tracing trauma in the category of “the inexpressible” through reoccurring motifs in the poet’s texts in the case of Dariusz Szczukowski; focusing on the roles/voices of the lyrical subject, specifically those marked with an authorial signature in relation to trauma and empathy (Wojciech Kruszewski). Jacek Łukasiewicz has also examined Różewicz’s lyrical voice in its different roles throughout
the poet’s career. His study builds on Skrendo’s monograph, as he deems the lyrical subject to be a transgressive one (located in and outside of the text).36 Some critics started reading Różewicz specifically in relation to the trauma of the Holocaust (Aleksandra Ubertowska, Skrendo, Tomasz Żukowski).37 Other studies have focused on an examination of the poet’s oeuvre in relation to visual art (Robert Cieślak and Michał Mrugalsk).38 More recent years have brought explorations of intertextuality in Różewicz’s oeuvre (Ubertowska in relation to German literature and Jan Potkański in relation to psychoanalysis).39 Standing apart from these approaches are Wojciech Browarny’s text, which analyzes Różewicz’s prose, drama, and poetry after 1989 in relation to the category of modern identity; and Tomasz Kunz’s study of poetics in relation to readerly response.40 Finally, certain studies have focused on tracing “gestures of farewells” (themes of old age, sickness, and death) in Różewicz’s late works (Ryszard Przybylski, Anna Legeżyńska, Grażyna Sztukiecka).41

I argue that critical approaches to Różewicz’s poetry which incorporate the category of trauma are to a great extent interrelated, as most draw on the motifs and categories seen in earlier criticism (particularly in Nycz and Majchrowski). Ryszard Nycz posits that the mature or late phase of Różewicz’s oeuvre returns to the question of extreme experiences (doświadczeń granicznych).42 Living through these extreme situations manifests itself in the form of a trace (ślad), flaw (skaza) and/or wound (rana).43 Although I do not use Nycz’s category of “wound” since I believe that reading Różewicz in this mode has already been exhausted, I concur with some of his key claims about this writer’s poetics. He argues, for instance, that the “mystery” in Różewicz’s texts lies in the semantics of “mutually opposing alternatives” of meaning or even multiplicity of meanings. This is achieved by a parataxis structure of texts which shield the connections between parts, and ascribe the responsibility of their deciphering onto the reader. While concurring with this observation, I posit further that it is the multiplicity of meaning/alternatives and the responsibility put on the reader that has kept me engaged in this writer and later became the focus of my reading of Różewicz’s texts. Nycz’s category of a “sylleptic” subject44 (utilized also by Kunz, Łukasiewicz, and Ubertowska among others) also proved helpful in my study since the consideration of the lyrical/textual subject as both textual and empirical allows me to link Różewicz’s conception of readerly and authorial ethics to an empirical sphere of responsibility, which reaches beyond the textual.
Connected with this readerly responsibility is what Skrendo describes as the poet’s transgression of literary borders and boundaries, which he claims has an ethical character. In Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury: Poetyka i etyka transgresji (2002), Skrendo argues that Różewicz is not only a poet of transgression, but also its critic. As critic, he divides transgressions into two spheres: those which occur, as Nycz would have it, within a „textual world” (tekstowy świat), within the sphere of literary texts; and the other, occurring within the existential sphere (of history, and biography). He describes the first category as a “poetics of repetition”, and category of re-contextualization, of artistic recycling and fragment. When discussing the existential sphere, he notes that the problem of war serves for Różewicz as a model of all transgressed experience, although this is the experience that is most mythologized and most assimilated. Skrendo concludes that Różewicz’s transgression of literary borders and boundaries has an ethical character as it refutes the need and celebration of excess.45

I do not utilize the category of transgression in my dissertation; however, I do suggest that the modes of reading in Różewicz’s oeuvre should be discussed in relation to ethics. In my view, it is precisely the multiplicity of opposing alternatives (Nycz), and readerly and authorial responsibility (since the authorial subjectivity is also presented as a reader in Różewicz’s texts) that must be seen in relation to ethics. In my understanding of the presence of an ethical response within Różewicz’s reading modes, I fall in line with Dariusz Szczukowski’s assessment of Różewicz’s general experience of literature. Szczukowski focuses on what he terms, “negative” categories in Różewicz’s oeuvre in his Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyrażalnego (2008). He discloses that he was inspired by Nycz’s scholarship46 and expounds that at the basis of Różewicz’s “formula of the inexpressible” lies the experience of “instability of being”, and above all, a “traumatic encounter with reality” (traumatyczne zetknięcie z realnością).47 He thematically explicates the obsessive motifs reoccurring in the poet’s oeuvre and posits that Różewicz’s poetic praxis can be seen as an attempt to continue motifs and themes of the avant-garde, with its crisis of language and the category of the “inexpressible” as a dominating category of modernist poetry.48 Szczukowski reads Różewicz’s experience of literature and the act of writing as an ethical one (where the writer is faced with an aporia: the consciousness of the impossibility of reaching an individual experience and the desire to respond to its call).49 The critic traces the “inexpressible” in the following themes: identity, the body, the Holocaust, and
the sacrum, and utilizes a psychoanalytic approach, namely Freud’s “das unheimliche” (uncanny) and Lacan’s “the mirror stage,” to aid his textual analysis. The Holocaust, Szczukowski argues, remains for Różewicz above all an individual experience which opposes linguistic representation.

I go beyond Szczukowski’s thesis however, since I move further than the ethics of writing, and focus also on reading and the prescription of reading practice with regards to the audience. I claim that the responsibility of an artist (and in my reading, also of the reader) exists in Różewicz’s conception of creating and reading literature. This is why I find it helpful to refer to James Phelan’s consideration of narrative rhetoric ethics and J. Hillis Miller’s “further act of language,” referring to writing and reading which transgresses the boundaries of the text, and reaches outside the textual sphere, via an act of ethical response.

In my approach to analyzing modes of reading in Różewicz’s texts, I should also mention where my study differs from that of Tomasz Kunz. In his book Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza: od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury (2005), Kunz focuses on the versification and poetics of reading, and attempts to reconstruct the mechanics of the creation of meaning. He concludes that Różewicz’s poetics is “radically unsystematic”\(^{50}\), what’s more, that it has a “subversive character”\(^{51}\) in that Różewicz is aiming for a type of “zero diction” (dykcja zerowa), since he questions the very identity and distinct nature of poetic language. According to Kunz (who uses here Ryszard Nycz’s category to aid his definition), Różewicz’s lyrical subject is sylleptic, meaning that it is simultaneously empirical and textual. While I also agree with the widely accepted claim that Różewicz’s lyrical subject is characterized by sylleptism, my interest in modes of reading focuses on the different types of reoccurring intertexts, objects, and images in Różewicz’s late, often multi-genre works. While Kunz’s study is broad, addressing the whole of Różewicz’s oeuvre, I focus on the writer’s late style. While I am also interested in the reading process, my study does not aim to characterize the writer’s poetics but rather to uncover authorial strategies and modes of reading within the texts which demand a certain readerly response. Kunz’s study, in my opinion, does not adequately acknowledge the author as a reader and re-reader whose own reading habits and fundamental beliefs on how one should read impact his authorial strategies. Moreover, I contest Kunz’s proposition of the reader arriving at an “adequate
interpretive procedure” (*adekwatna procedura interpretacyjna*). I do not think that such an “arrival” is possible; we can only follow the modes which Różewicz sets up for the reader and by doing so, attempt to reach closer to, rather than to “arrive” at, an adequate interpretation.

Where my study centers on the reading of objects and images, thus drawing from current theories regarding prosthetic memory and postmemory (in particular Alison Landsberg and Marianne Hirsch, respectively), I need to stress my affinity with Robert Cieślak’s proposition that Różewicz’s lyrical subject is a „cultural man” (*człowiek kulturowy*), a subjectivity which negotiates his own identity thanks to his/her openness towards the sphere of culture and active presence within it. My approach in reading art and other images however, entirely differs from Michał Mrugalski’s study *Teoria barw Tadeusza Różewicza* (2007), in which he aims to reinterpret Różewicz’s poetry through colour, yet disengages completely from the meaning of iconography within culture.

Since I analyze texts, objects, and images in Różewicz’s late oeuvre, noting that these intertexts repeatedly point to the reoccurring theme of the Holocaust, I need to comment briefly on how my study differs from the work of Aleksandra Ubertowska, whose criticism most prominently places Różewicz’s oeuvre in the context of Holocaust writing. As the title of one of her articles indicates, Ubertowska is interested in the concept of “rewriting the Holocaust” and posits that Różewicz’s poetic volumes from the late 1990s and early 2000s inscribe themselves in the current of texts which search for a new way of writing about the Holocaust. Yet, these same texts simultaneously refer back to the poet’s postwar debut volumes, *Anxiety* (1947) and *The Red Glove* (1948) – hence ‘re-writing’. Moreover, in her book *Świadectwo-Trauma-Głos: Literackie Reprezentacje Holokaustu* (2007), she reads Różewicz’s oeuvre within the formula of “the saved” (“Ocalony”). She calls on Paul de Man’s concept of “autobiography as de-facement” to claim that this poet’s texts hide a subtext which is the story of Różewicz’s Polish-Jewish identity. She argues that Różewicz in his game with the audience employs a strategy of masking the truth, which arises from a fear of revealing his true identity. Ubertowska concludes that the “rhetoric of emancipation,” which would free Różewicz’s oeuvre from falsehood and hiding behind masks, does not fully develop. Thus, she asserts, there are hidden falsehoods and critical misreading when it comes to interpreting Różewicz’s early volumes. Although I admit that Ubertowska’s
position is very seductive, I do not follow her lead wholeheartedly and urge her readers to proceed with caution. The critic herself asserts that her line of interpretation stirs up ethical questions about exposing private secrets that the writer is perhaps unwilling to disclose. In my study, I address the reading process as one of discovering secrets, yet I do not focus on the issue of Różewicz’s Jewishness. I believe that there was a reason why the issue of the Jewish heritage of Różewicz’s mother was not fully exposed or embraced in Różewicz’s writing, and why this author did not redefine his identity as that of a Jewish writer post 1989. I address this issue in more detail in my second chapter of this study in reference to the text *Mother Departs*.

Lastly, I would like to distance myself both from Legeżyńska and Sztukiecka, as my consideration of reading Różewicz’s late oeuvre reaches beyond the motifs of “gestures of farewell”, of death, and old age. In her 1999 study, *Gest pożegnani: Szkice o poetyckiej świadomości elegijno-ironicznej*, Legeżyńska analyzes the „gestures of farewell” in contemporary Polish poetry at the end of the 1990s. She distinguishes them as part of a conventional model which the poets cannot escape since, she asserts, these gestures are a natural consequence taking place at the end of an artistic biography. Moreover, she observes that this contemporary elegiac tone (closely related to the end of an epoch, the 1990s) is characterized by irony. She notes that Różewicz obsessively returns to the theme of death (from the death of the body to the metaphor of the death of consciousness, language, poetry, history, culture, civilization). She posits that, paradoxically, it is the obsession with death that keeps Różewicz’s poetry alive. According to this critic, although the “gesture of farewell” could be used to characterize the whole of this poet’s oeuvre, in her analysis, she focuses only on, what in her esteem, are the elegiac volumes – *Plaskorzeźba* (1991), and *zawsze fragment* (1996). I have the advantage of considering another 18 years of Różewicz’s oeuvre since the publication of *zawsze fragment*, and I argue that this author has published many other poetic volumes that may be described as “elegiac,” yet which simultaneously contest the notion of elegiac tone, of farewells and of closure.

Grażyna Sztukiecka in her book *Umrę cały? Rozmowy w cieniu śmierci: Senilna poezja Czesława Miłosza, Tadeusza Różewicza, Zbigniewa Herberta i Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza* (2011) stresses the word “conversations” (*rozmowy*), highlighting that the texts cannot be read
without tracing their references to each other, as these poets use “double voiced discourse” (słowo-dwugłosowe) in which another’s voice can also be heard. Through such dialogues between the authors, she suggests, one can see better what has been happening in Polish poetry post-1989. Although she does not accept the idea of a “breakthrough” (“przelm”), arguing that the end of an epoch does not signify an end of an epoch in literature, she notes that writers she examines did not concentrate on politics and history in their texts, but rather on private histories and everyday existence. Moreover, she observes that, differently from Herbert, Rymkiewicz or Miłosz, Różewicz does not write about death that often in his late poetry. Sztukiecka’s work also contrasts with Legeżyńska, in that, Sztukiecka posits, Różewicz’s lyrical subject experiences death mainly on the existential plane, rather than in the sphere of culture. Sztukiecka suggests that on the existential plane, in his lack of acceptance of death, the Old Poet departs from the model of “tamed death” (śmierci oswojonej).

I contest the latter of Szczukiecka’s claims, namely that Różewicz moves away from the model of “tamed death”, as I propose that his Mother Departs (1999) can be read precisely as a volume which makes this attempt. Although I agree that in his late poetry Różewicz focuses on private histories and prioritizes everyday experience, I oppose the assertion that his lyrical subject experiences death only on the existential plane, and not in the realm of culture. In my view, Różewicz most definitely experiences death in the realm of culture and that is what his argument with contemporary culture stems from. Contemporary mass culture threatens with the devaluation of humanistic values, and the relativization of truth and ethics—compromising the values that Różewicz’s poetry cautiously embraces.

No doubt, the detailed textual analysis and overview of this writer’s late works undertaken by both Legeżyńska and Szczukiecka have positively contributed to my own thinking about Różewicz as an author and as a reader. I agree with Legeżyńska in one key regard: that Różewicz’s “dialogue with Shadows” in recent volumes is peppered with irony and mockery. However, I did not want to confine my study of Różewicz’s later texts to these fairly narrow motifs, which in my view limit our understanding of his late oeuvre and authorial persona as both an author and a reader. I argue that Różewicz’s late texts are so much more than a “dialogue
with Shadows” or farewells. By concentrating on the dominant thematics of the experience of history, of private / familial stories, and of reading contemporary culture, I claim that Różewicz obsessively re-reads, re-writes, and projects his reading praxis in different modes of reading for his ideal audience. By doing so, he opens up his oeuvre to a multiplicity of themes and contexts – a praxis which counters the motifs of conclusions and finitude.

Since my dissertation deals with Różewicz’s late works, I must address the category of a writer’s “late style.” Late style, as I define it for the purpose of this study, is a self-reflexive approach to one’s narrative craft and previous body of work, frequently characterized by a self-conscious authorial creation of one’s own self-image in view of one’s mortality and ending career. Edward Said, in his book On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain (2006), is not interested in lateness as closure and serenity, but rather as an opposition; he explores lateness that displays "intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction."\textsuperscript{55} It is Said’s line of thought that inspired my thinking about Różewicz’s late poetry. Late style in my view is distinguished by and responds to the cognitive and aesthetic evaluation of one’s life’s work, artistic legacy, and the metaphysical angst of mortality. Unlike Said, I see it as a tension between recognition of and reconciliation to closure, as well as difficulty with it and/or opposition to it. The problem of the authorial construction of lyrical subjectivity (as a reader) and modes of textual construction are important questions in this dissertation. In this vein, I analyse Tadeusz Różewicz as a reader (of his own works and of texts of other authors) and the authorial strategies / modes which guide the reading praxis of the authorial audience. Authorial self-consciousness is a characteristic trait of Różewicz’s late style, yet more importantly, I propose that a key recurring motif in this author’s works is a conscious design of his ideal audience’s reading praxis via specific strategies of building readerly response. My dissertation, titled Modes of Reading Texts, Objects, and Images: Late Poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz, concentrates on three works of Różewicz’s late oeuvre: Mother Departs (1999), professor’s knife (2001), and Kup Kota w Worku (work in progress) (2008) as exemplars of the poet’s authorial strategies of prescriptive reading praxis (prescribed by Różewicz for his ideal audience, which simultaneously unveils the poet himself as a reader). I focus on the abovementioned three works, all published after the political turn of 1989, as these mark a new phase in Różewicz’s oeuvre – his comeback from nearly a decade of silence, a comeback initiated in 1991 with the publication of a volume of poetry titled Plaskorzeźba.
Różewicz is a consummate reader known for his lifelong intellectual relationships and dialogues with works of writers and philosophers belonging to various schools of thought and time periods. To name only the most famous, these include Adam Mickiewicz, J. W. Goethe, Franz Kafka, Stefan Żeromski, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. A man who is an obsessive reader and re-reader, not only of high literature but also of texts of popular culture such as newspapers, periodicals, and TV and radio news, permits his daily reading habits to permeate his texts. Yet this seemingly haphazard amalgamation of countless intertextual references aids the key gestures involved in building a reading strategy (for Różewicz’s reader and of Różewicz as a reader). I identify the key strategic modes in this poet’s late works as: 1) a strategy/mode of multi-voicing, and paradoxically of being the sole focalizer, 2) a mode of sharing or keeping secrets (understood syleptically, as “intertextual” (wewnątrztekstowe) and outside textual (poza tekstowe), the latter referring to history or biography, 3) a mode of thematizing the ethics of reading, and 4) a mode of mockery, revealing authorial insecurity. I focus on these approaches and not others because I consider these to be the most prominent, frequently occurring authorial strategies. My analysis of these patterns will show Różewicz’s self-reflexive modes of reading assembled for his ideal reader (how he reads and how he would like us to be reading his works).

When he was nearing the end of his artistic journey, perhaps prompted by the pressure of diminishing time, Różewicz now and then announced that he was making one last attempt at a published work. He was simultaneously well-aware of what is valuable and what is no longer relevant, and what can and cannot be still accomplished in the dwindling years of one’s lifetime.

As his career was coming to an end Różewicz, with increasing intensity, became his own reader (reading his own oeuvre), uncovering for us, the reading audience, not only how he reads but most importantly his design for our reading praxis of his texts.

Each of the three works I consider in this study, *Mother Departs* (1999), *professor’s knife* (2001), and *Kup kota w worku (work in progress)* (2008), has a different dominant thematic, yet the strategies of multi-voicing and focalizing, sharing secrets, reflecting on the ethics of reading, and mockery peppered with insecurity reoccur in each of the volumes, albeit with varying intensity and prominence. I chose these three volumes and not others as I want to show how
Różewicz deals with issues of history, contemporary culture, and private biography – all central themes in Różewicz’s late poetry. In my opinion, these three works best demonstrate the intricacies and interconnectedness of these themes. In *Mother Departs*, Różewicz re-reads himself via his earlier entries in *Dziennik Gliwicki* as he constructs a multi-voiced, multi-genre volume dedicated to his mother. In *professor’s knife* he returns to the topic of the Holocaust via his friend’s personal history of his survival of it. Finally, with *Kup kota w worku*, he embarks on a raid of contemporary culture, parodying modern-day language and the predominant commercialism of art. In each of these works, images, objects, and texts are read with meticulous attention. My study focuses on these vital images, objects, and texts, which are positioned at the core of Różewicz’s self-reflexive re-reading. I analyse the shifts of modes of reading in each of the abovementioned works. This analysis leads me to an explication of Różewicz’s authorial strategies of reading modes and of the readerly praxis inscribed in his late oeuvre. We know that Różewicz’s ideal reader is one who reads carefully, in depth, re-reads multiple times, returning to the same work repeatedly, and is culturally well-read. Moreover, this is someone who is not only curious and willing to search for clues, intertexts, and a multiplicity of meanings, but also a reader who has time. Yet, how is this reader guided by the poet via his authorial strategies in each of the volumes and what do these modes tell us about the reception that Różewicz longs for?

To examine these self-reflexive authorial modes, I employ James Phelan’s rhetorical theory, as well as J. Hillis Miller’s conception of reading as a part of an ethical conduct of one’s life demanding a “further act of language.” Phelan’s rhetorical theory outlined in *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (1996) highlights the judgements and responses readers make as they engage in the reading process. Rhetorical theory is particularly suited for my consideration of Różewicz’s authorial strategies and specific reading praxis since it aims to recognize the judgements that readers are guided to make, the consequences of those judgements for textual and readerly dynamics, and the way these judgement interactions reveal the larger purpose of the narrative. Phelan acknowledges that his approach to reading is indebted to rhetorical theorists such as Kenneth Burke and Wayne C. Booth who emphasize narrative as a distinctive means for an author to communicate knowledge, feelings, values, and beliefs to an audience. Phelan maintains that authorial choices about textual dynamics are
influenced by the anticipation of readerly judgements and their consequences. I propose that Różewicz guides his ideal reader to make judgements on all three levels of the rhetorical experience: interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic. By anticipating and guiding those judgements, he vouches for a particular reading praxis which should emulate his own reading process. Rhetorical narrative theory compliments my reading of Różewicz since I focus on chosen authorial strategies and their impact on the reading process. Similarly to Phelan (and the reader response critics), I posit that the authorial intention is not fully recoverable and instead advocate a shifting emphasis from author as controller to the recursive relationship among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response, emphasizing the general concern with the recursive rhetorical transaction of reading.

Focusing on the authorial strategy of multi-voicing and focalization, I utilize Phelan’s key notion of the rhetorical dimension of a narrative. The critic explains that the rhetoric of narrative is not simply the idea that a narrative uses rhetoric. He posits that it is, more precisely, a “telling of a particular story to a particular audience for (...) a particular purpose,” which allows the reader to examine not only the story and the situation of its telling, but also the teller, the intended audience, and finally the story’s aim. Thus, the narrative is not only the “what” of the story, but also the action (the telling of the story to a listener/reader on a specific occasion). Moreover, focusing on multi-voicing allows us to analyse the parallel acts of telling (the lyrical voice and the voice of the implied author). I concur with Phelan that as we read and participate in the rhetorical exchange and interpret the text, this eventually leads us to reflect on the power of the narrative and its purpose. Therefore, when we read we should ask ourselves how we situate ourselves emotively and ethically in relationship to the text and to the author himself. This is precisely what Różewicz wants us to do as we read, since, I argue, only with this emotive and ethical engagement can we fully participate in the reading praxis which the poet designs for his ideal reader.

Recursive reading praxis is inevitably linked to both sharing and searching for secrets and to the ethics of reading that is central for Różewicz. I link my consideration of multi-voicing and focalization with sharing secrets and the ethics of reading through a focus on voice and tone, their tensions, instabilities, and communicated values. Voice can be used as a means of achieving
particular effects, yet simultaneously it is a means of conveying values. When we sense a discrepancy between an author’s values and those expressed in a lyrical voice or narrator’s voice, we have a situation of a double-voiced discourse, which Phelan marks with the term distance. In Różewicz’s late oeuvre, distance establishes a tension between the author and the lyrical voice, as well as between the author and the reader. Paradoxically, this distance or tension may also function as a major source of our continued interest and engagement in the narrative. This distance helps to define the instability within a narrative, which the reader wants to track, and perhaps ultimately see resolved. When Różewicz tackles real news stories, or history (such as the reoccurring topic of the Holocaust and its representation for example), the lyrical voice addresses an audience that already has some knowledge of context. Surprisingly however, this shared knowledge between the audience and the lyrical voice does form a basis for emotional intimacy. It is the withholding of secrets that creates distance rather than intimacy, as Różewicz wants to pull us in with secrets, yet at the same time, by not disclosing them fully, pushes the reader away. Which secrets are disclosed, which can be deciphered, and where the author sets boundaries of nondisclosure has a direct impact on our engagement in the narrative, and also affects our ethical response.

Similarly to Phelan (and other critics, such as Matei Calinescu for example, who view the reading experience as one of sharing secrets), I focus on the ethical dimension of reading as secret sharing. Additionally, however, I claim that the ethical experience of reading transcends that of secret-sharing, taking the reading experience into the realm of one’s real-life conduct. The ethical engagement with the text transcends the reading process. Such a claim necessitates my consideration of J. Hillis Miller’s proposition of relating the acts of reading and writing to the ethical conduct of one’s life. His understanding of the reading praxis reflecting on one’s life ethics is conceived as demanding from the ideal reader a “further act of language”, which Miller identifies as a necessary response to the reading process. My analysis of Różewicz’s late oeuvre proves that for Różewicz as well, the reading process demands a further engagement, such as talking about the work, writing about it, or teaching it, where the act of reading (a private act performed alone) enters the public sphere. Różewicz, time and time again, demands these further acts of language from his ideal reader. Moreover, he calls for these ethical acts not only with regards to issues which concern facts of individual and collective history, but also the
ethical practice which pertains to continued, careful and recursive re-reading and re-evaluation of his works. His own lifelong praxis of reading and the guidance he gives to his ideal reader point to a careful, slow re-reading of texts and an engagement in those “further acts of language” which bring our private reading into the public sphere of critical discussion, influencing the intellectual interpretive communities of which we are a part.

The first chapter of my dissertation focuses on the professor’s knife and deals with the creative and mnemonic strategy of re-writing and re-reading of the past in lieu of historical narratives and personal life stories. I explore the issues of memory and remembering, personalizing history and ethics of institutionalized historical narratives in relation to Alison Landsberg’s concept of prosthetic memory (echoing here Derrida’s prosthesis of the archive), and Bożena Shallcross’ study of the Holocaust object. In her book The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture (2011), Shallcross reads ordinary objects (such as glasses, spoons, teapots) as cultural texts and aids her reading with philosophical and theoretical approaches to the nature of matter as such. Landsberg, on the other hand, addresses the politics and ethics of memory conveyed through mass cultural forms such as the cinema, TV programs, or public sites of memory or commemoration (such as monuments). Both of these approaches to memory, via the object as a cultural text, and via commemoration of history in mass culture, are considerations which problematize Różewicz’s reading of personal and collective history in this volume. Różewicz reads the archive (of photographs, documents, texts), and of ordinary objects. He builds his narrative around the story of a Holocaust object (a small knife discovered on his friend’s work desk), and around other representations of Holocaust and war trauma. In the professor’s knife Różewicz once more returns to re-evaluate the role and the perspective of a witness. Does he still have the need and desire to bear witness to the traumas of history – a position which he already once refuted, in the mid-1960s?

The thematic dominant of this volume strikes a balance between the grand narratives of history and “small” personal stories. Różewicz approaches grand historical narratives with suspicion, distrust, and irony. In professor’s knife, the poet wants to personalize those “big stories” of history with “small stories” of individuals and their secrets. He guides his reader to focus on the ethics of tracing and uncovering secrets, as well as sharing and keeping secrets. I propose that in
this volume, the “secret sharing” is the dominant authorial strategy that guides Różewicz’s praxis of prescriptive reading outlined for his ideal audience. Różewicz is concerned with what becomes irrecoverable after death, as the title of this volume suggest; what stories can and/or cannot be read from the objects we leave behind. He weighs in on which secrets should be shared and witnessed, and which should not surface into the public forum. Although images intensify and problematize the ethical questions of this narrative, Różewicz signals that prosthetic memory is ultimately disappointing, as it does not transmit the reality of trauma.

In the second chapter of this study, I concentrate on the silvic61 volume *Mother Departs* (1999) and analyse the poet’s unusual autobiographical strategy in which he fashions his text via mnemonic journey to his familial past, seemingly creating a portrait of his late mother. In *Mother Departs*, Różewicz adapts an autobiographical stance of showing his life through the eyes of others, and, vice versa, of observing others’ lives through his own powers of perception. The thematic dominant in this hybrid volume of poetry, prose, journal entries, and personal documents overtly dedicated to the poet’s late mother is personal history, familial archive and what remains of it once we die. Różewicz re-reads his record of his mother’s death (noted four decades earlier in *Dziennik Gliwicki*) to face his regrets as he confronts his own mortality. However, in *Mother Departs*, more than in other works, the “constructedness” of the text, or rather multiple texts, comes to the fore. This text, categorized by some critics as an earnest “homage to the mother”, is in my view an autobiographical act of re-reading with a difference, where Różewicz attempts to speak the unspoken, and address the ruptures of the past.

To explore the notion of construction of records/archives in connection to secrets, or blank pages of the past, I call on Jacques Derrida’s explication of the concept of the archive in his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995). Derrida’s approach to this topic is particularly helpful to my analysis since his main assertions about the nature and problematic of the archive shed light on how Różewicz uses it in his text. Derrida conceives of the archive as not being only about the past, but more so about the future, as a prosthesis which not only records, but produces the event. Moreover, a prosthesis is spectral in structure (prosthetic memories, which circulate publically are acquired via an experience of a wide range of cultural technologies). Experiential sites such as a museum, theatre, cinema, and mass media enable people to enter into an experiential
relationship with events they themselves have not lived through. Yet, Alison Landsberg acknowledges the danger that these modern mass-mediated forms of memory are subject to revisionism. I suggest that not only may they be subject to revisionism, but also to possible destruction and disappearance. In this sense prosthesis may be spectral in nature. These key notions of not only recording of the past, but also producing the archive allow me to explore Różewicz’s use of both archival and quasi-documentary material seemingly structured around the “spectre” of this text, the figure of the mother, and to reveal the temporal manipulations of the text in its status as a silvic text. I also draw on a comparison with Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980), as a narrative that is both a treatise on photography/archival representation, and one which mourns the death of the author’s mother. This comparison is especially fruitful since Różewicz echoes Barthes’ famous gesture of focusing on a single photograph of his mother to capture his mourning and reminiscence of her. As Różewicz guides his reader through the texts that comprise this volume, similarly to Barthes, he questions the power of documents, records, and photography in the preservation of memory. He seems also to be implicitly asking how his own memory will be shaped by the texts that will remain after his own departure.

In *Mother Departs*, the three authorial modes of multi-voicing and focalizing, sharing secrets, and the ethics of reading process are present, yet I argue that it is the focus on multi-voicing in connection with reading and creating the texts of the familial archive that takes prominence. In including not only his own texts from the past, but also narratives authored or stylized on others’ authorship, Różewicz highlights multi-voicing, yet simultaneously, though implicitly, thematizes the reading process. Each of these texts has been created with a slightly different audience in mind, yet Różewicz adapts all for his authorial audience. He is the focalizer who simultaneously creates and reads the familial archive, and through this process examines what constitutes and what remains from a personal history (experiential, written, and remembered). I use the term *focalizer* in accordance with how Mieke Bal first introduced it to narratology, as a narrator who “sees,” basing her term on Genette’s famous distinction between “who speaks” (the narrator) and one who “sees”. On the surface, this volume is dedicated to the life of the mother seen in relationship to that of her sons; yet it is also, and I would argue, predominantly, a story of the life of the poet—Różewicz himself—as he reads it through the texts of others (and his own).
In the concluding chapter of my dissertation, I explore the thematic dominant in *Kup kota w worku*, namely that of popular culture as rereading and re-writing. This is where my dissertation opens up new contexts of reading Różewicz as I explore his existence within the new economic system of capitalism in Poland. I conceive of Różewicz’s authorial strategy of reading in this volume in relation to Calinescu’s and Phelan’s concept of reading and re-reading for the secret, and Miller’s notion of the ethics of reading. Why is the poet’s tone so different in this work? What goals does he set for himself and his reader with this text? Is the authorial portrait of a sophisticated yet sneering pop culture player and (self) mocker an image created for the author’s or reader’s benefit? Finally, is this the real, unmasked Różewicz or yet another of his player’s masks? This work pushes the boundaries of genres and kitsch, and of the private and public. It also exploits the commercialism of contemporary culture. In his dialogic authorial strategy, Różewicz wants to play all roles – that of author, reader, and critic. He attempts to contest his public image and fight for the recognition of his artistic legacy. Różewicz structures this text as a puzzle as he layers countless intertexts and secrets. The writer suggests with the title of his volume that we, the readers, are buying something without having seen it, an idiomatic “cat in the hat” or “pig in a poke”. Różewicz adapts a sneering tone, and while he ridicules popular mass culture, he points an accusatory finger at his readers and shames us for our lack of cultural competence. This is when the poet is perhaps the most difficult to like. He is an “old gentleman” who points out our joyful enjoyment of kitsch and our limited understanding of the contemporary narratives that surround us. Yet at the same time, he shows that it is vital for him to inscribe himself into that culture and adapt some of its tactics. This partly sneering, partly clownish polemic, one that seeks to spar with his critics, readers, and popular culture, is in my opinion Różewicz’s most anxious attempt not only to prove the relevance of his voice and position, but also to show that his works remain current as they assess and engage the most recent cultural texts and phenomena. In *Kup Kota w Worku*, we see the poet’s vulnerability exposed through the authorial gesture of multi-voicing. Under the masks of parody, humour, but also harsh sarcasm, and under the guise of many voices and multiplicity of tones, Różewicz contestingly and most anxiously fights for his authorial voice and artistic legacy.
NOTES

1 See Tadeusz Borowski’s *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* (Proszę państwa do gazu, 1959) and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński’s *A World Apart* (Inny Świat: Zapiski sowieckie, 1951).

2 The name comes from Roman Bratny’s book about this generation titled *Kolumbowie: Rocznik 20* (1957).


7 Tadeusz Borowski in his collection of short stories *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* (1959) gave his hero and narrator his own name, thus blurring the boundaries between the factual and fictional. Vorarbeiter Tadek was described as “lagierized” (“człowiek zlagrowany”)—one who has accepted the norms of the concentration camps, including some of the behaviours of the perpetrators in order to survive, at times at the cost of the lives of others. It is important to note however, that some of Borowski’s famous stories were published for the first time in Warsaw already in 1948.

8 Term used by Karl Jaspers, whom Różewicz also quotes.


12 Burkot, 85.


14 Burkot, 82.


17 Ibid., 17.

18 Burkot, 139.

19 Ibid., 139.

20 Ibid., 142.


23 Burkot, 146-7.


27 Herbert’s last volume *Epilog Burzy* (*Epilogue to a Storm*) was published in 1998 (the year of his death).

28 Burkot, 323.

29 A detailed review of Różewicz’s reception within Poland and abroad, from the time of his debut with *Niepokój* (1947) to *Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego* (1983), has already been conducted by Tadeusz Drewnowski in his monograph, *Walka o oddech. Biopetyka: o pisarstwie Tadeusza Różewicza* (1990). Drewnowski expanded the previous text in the second edition (2002) to encompass the last two decades of Różewicz’s texts, from *Plaskorzęba* (1991) to *nożyk profesora* (2001). An updated compendium of the poet’s works and reception was also added. Drewnowski notes that his poetic beginnings and debut in 1947 were marked by great success; (his debut was supported by then, a very influential voice of the Avant-garde, the poet Julian Przyboś; he was hailed by a slightly older Czesław Milosz as a great poet, he also had the friendship of another great master of poetry, Leopold Staff). At the beginning of 1950s, during socrealism, Różewicz received the etiquette of a “formalist” and an “ideologue of imperialism”, yet he was tirelessly defended by *Tygodnik Powszechny*, mainly thanks to the pen of Zdzisław Łapiński. Drewnowski notes that while in the 1960s Różewicz was gaining popularity not only as a poet, but also a dramatist, his earlier supporter and mentor, Julian Przyboś engineered an attack on his former pupil in the literary press and staged it as a supposed conflict of the old Avant-garde with the new one. In the 1960s there were also voices that accused Różewicz of nihilism; one great and influential critic, Jan Błoński even termed the poet’s
worldview: “a tragic nihilism” (nihilizm tragiczny). Yet, at the same time, Różewicz’s oeuvre gained interest among younger and devoted literary critics (Marta Piwińska, Elżbieta Morawiec, Józef Kelera, Stanisław Gębala, Zbigniew Majchrowski). The 1970s, which Drewnowski identifies as a new, mature phase in Różewicz’s oeuvre, did not find an understanding and adequate critical reception among Polish critics. He asserts that critics either turned silent or were motivated by politics in their critical evaluations. As I mentioned earlier, his iconoclastic plays, White Marriage (Białe małżeństwo, 1975) or Bite the Dust (Do Piachu, 1979) caused a lot of stir, arguments, and ultimately brought Różewicz a great deal of scorn. Naturally, as I will show in the following pages of my review of criticism, this all changed in the 1990s.


32 See Ryszard Nycz, “‘Tajemnica okaleczonej poezji.’ Trzy glossy do twórczości Tadeusza Różewicza,” in Zobaczycy poezję. Materiały konferencji “Twórczość Tadeusza Różewicza” UAM Poznań, 4-6 XI 1991, ed. Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska et al. (Poznań: WiS, 1993). Moreover, Zbigniew Majchrowski, in ‘Poezja jak otwarta rana’ (czytając Różewicza) (1993), contends that as Różewicz traveled through the symbolic map of European culture, he concluded that the condition needed for the revival of poetry is the return to the archetype of the poet. The motif of a wounded artist is one which is constantly present, and time and time again, renewed throughout all of Różewicz’s oeuvre. Majchrowski proposes that Różewicz’s persistent artistic and personal fascinations with artists and biographies of artists (such as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Leo Tolstoy, Maria Komornicka, Franz Kafka) form a symbolic biography of an artist of the century, whose identifying sign/feature is the motif of being wounded, of bearing a scar/stigma.


34 See Dariusz Szczukowski, Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyrażalnego (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).


36 See Jacek Łukasiewicz, TR (Kraków: Universitas, 2012). The author provides an overview of the roles adapted by Różewicz’s lyrical subject throughout the poet’s career, culminating in the late works with poet-raconteur (gawędzarz).

37 See Aleksandra Ubertowska, „Tożsamość jako ślad kryptograficzny (Holocaust w późnych poematach Tadeusza Różewicza),” in Świadectwo – Trauma – Głos: Literackie Reprezentacje Holocaustu (Kraków: Universitas, 2007) and her „Przesypanie Zagłady. Shoa w późnych poematach Tadeusza Różewicza,” Pamiętnik Literacki (2) 2004. See also Tomasz Żukowski, „Zagłada jako język poetycki Tadeusza Różewicza,” in Literatura polska wobec Zagłady, eds. A. Brodzka, D. Krawczyńska and J. Leociak, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny: 2000). Żukowski proposes that the trope of a “trace” (“ślad”) is the central category of Różewicz’s early poetry. Moreover, also Skrendo contends that Różewicz can be read as a Holocaust poet since his works, from Ocalony to professor’s knife, can be read as a testimony of not only a survivor of war, but also someone who has been saved from the Holocaust. Recently, (May 21, 2013) a conference on the topic of Różewicz’s oeuvre and the
Holocaust took place at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The one-day symposium, “Niepokoje”: Twórczość Tadeusza Różewicza wobec Zagłady drew a number of prominent critics (Andrzej Skrendo, Robert Cieślak, Leszek Szaruga, Marian Kisiel, Tomasz Żukowski, and Tomasz Kunz among others).


40 See Wojciech Browarny, _Tadeusz Różewicz i nowoczesna tożsamość_ (Kraków: Universitas, 2013) and Tomasz Kunz, _Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza: od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury_ (Kraków: Universitas, 2005).


43 Ryszard Nycz, “‘Tajemnica okaleczonej poezji’, 97. This essay has been later republished with an added section commenting on Różewicz’s “nożyk profesora” in Ryszard Nycz, “Tadeusza Różewicza ‘tajemnica okaleczonej poezji,’” in _Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości_ (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 186-207.

44 Ryszard Nycz, _Tropy „ja”. Koncepcja podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia_, in _Język modernizmu_ (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002). Nycz proposes that the sylleptic „I” should be understood simultaneously in two ways: as empirical and as textual, and as authentic and fictional.

45 Skrendo proposes that the ethical sense of Różewicz’s act of transgression is one of disagreement with the Modernist tradition, especially with its Young Poland (Młoda Polska) version, and with postmodernism (since the poet disagrees with both, the Young Poland’s metaphysical need of transgression, and the postmodernist complete and joyful resignation from these needs.

46 Particularly “‘Wyrażanie niewyrażalnego’ w literaturze nowoczesnej (wybrane zagadnienia), which appeared as part of Nycz’s influential book _Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości_ (2001), as well as in a volume of Polish criticism _Literatura wobec niewyrażalnego_ (W. Bolecki and E. Kuźma, 1998).

47 Szczukowski, _Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyrażalnego_, 11.
48 Ibid., 13, 8.

49 Ibid., 14.

50 Kunz, Strategie negatywne, 45.

51 Ibid., 46.

52 Ibid., 23.

53 Cieślak, Oko poety, 219.


57 Phelan, Narrative as Rhetoric, 18.

58 Ibid., 4.


61 I use the term “silvic” in the sense that Ryszard Nycz defines in his book Sylwy współczesne (1996), as a multi-genre, multi-voiced text which in its opening should announce (by thematized or concealed means) the frame of communication into which all of the subsequent texts will be inserted.

Chapter 1
Trains of Memory: Re-reading and Archiving Private and Public Pasts in Tadeusz Różewicz’s *the professor’s knife*¹

*The real voyage of discovery...*

*Consists not in seeking new landscapes,*

*But in having new eyes,*

*In seeing the universe with the eyes of another,*

*Of a hundred others,*

*In seeing the hundred universes that each of them sees.*²

*To dwell means to leave traces.*³

1 Archival historical and prosthetic memory: re-reading the “railway”

Tadeusz Różewicz’s *the professor’s knife* (2001) is a poetic text framed by two photographs: one on each of the volume’s covers, front and back. The front cover depicts the titular object, the knife, while the back folio shows a photograph of a train wagon, the latter a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem. The volume itself consists of a cycle called “the professor’s knife,” composed of six individually titled parts, as well as five other poems. The publication in original Polish also contains different versions and drafts of the text with author’s notes that are included at the end of the volume. In this chapter, I limit my analysis primarily to the abovementioned titular cycle, complementing my reading with two other poems, “Dawn Day and Night with a Red Rose” (Świt dzień i noc z czerwoną różą) and “gateway” (brama), while
omitting the volume’s other texts that do not deal with the Holocaust. I have chosen to limit my discussion of the professor’s knife to the poems dealing with the Holocaust, since this is the unifying event of private and public memory that Róžewicz explores both in the majority of the collection’s poems and in those visual images which frame the publication. As such, I conceive of Róžewicz’s text as one constructed within the interplay of collective historical and cultural memory and private reminiscence, in doing so, dealing with the problems of remembrance and commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. As Kazimierz Nowosielski notes, Róžewicz belongs to a group of writers whose oeuvre has been defined throughout the years by their sense of loyalty to those who perished. In the present era, labeled by some critics as a time of “entropy of historical memory” caused by amnesia-promoting new media technologies, the poet re-examines and rereads the well-known, and thus depleted, even cliché tropes and symbols of Holocaust memory. In doing so, he reflects on how prosthetic memory is constructed; how it functions differently within various historical, political, and cultural contexts; and, finally, how our individual archives of memory, inevitably dependent, themselves, on institutionally shaped and sustained cultural memory, are susceptible to naïve and unreflective constructs of palimpsests. “Prosthetic memory” is a term used by Alison Landsberg who in her book Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture (2004) argues that modernity has made both possible and necessary a new form of cultural memory that she labels “prosthetic.” Such memory surfaces when an individual encounters a historical narrative at an experiential site be it at the cinema, a monument, or a museum. Landsberg argues that technologies of mass culture such as cinema facilitate common social frameworks and structure “imagined communities” that are not necessarily geographically or nationally bounded, yet share prosthetic memory as a sensuous phenomenon that attains much of its power through affect.

For Róžewicz’s poetic volume, the defining sites of memory (lieu de memoire) are the main iconographic tropes (the professor’s knife, trains, and the images of victims’ bodies) which the writer presents both in the narrated text and through photographic images. I examine these tropes to argue that, through maintaining the tension between personal memory and the iconographic tropes that have become the core of Holocaust representations both in scholarly and popular media discourses, Róžewicz alludes to tropes within the textual memory of his own oeuvre that have become as clichéd as images of the Holocaust through decades of overuse. Thus, reflecting
on the workings of personal memory within the archive of historical and cultural memory, the poet also confronts the memory and reading of his own texts. It is through these frequently sardonic, intertextual links that he remembers, re-reads, re-interprets, and re-writes his own authorial self. He stresses that both individual (human/existential) and cultural, textual memory are filtered through the individual subject (the poet) and impacted by the inevitable engulfing chronos. The subjectivity of the aging poet and of cultural memory become prisms through which the reader sees Różewicz’s biographical and textual past in the form of textual and iconographic tropes. The lyrical voice (which in most texts of the volume the poet identifies as his authorial voice) becomes the key focalizer of events. By becoming the lens through which we see the images he shares, Różewicz aims to disrupt those set, uncritical, or stagnant memories we possess by re-examining and re-reading images and texts. He peels off layers of interpretation to show the dissonances which lie beneath. Only such an approach to textual and cultural memory, one confronting complexity and discord, can begin to approach the remnants of truth of personal and public pasts.

Różewicz’s understanding of the functioning of memory in history seems to echo that of the French historian Pierre Nora, who proposes that the real, inviolate social memory embodied by primitive archaic societies has perished along with them, while modern societies motivated by change organize their past as an archival historical memory.7 In Nora’s conception, archival memory relies on establishing a trace by means of the materiality, particularity, and visibility of a recording or image.8 Public historical memory in modern societies is shaped by public sites of memory such as museums, memorials, and monuments.9 Moreover, this memory consists of a certain shared “canon” of cultural literacy, or sociolect, which comprises common allusions and references (i.e. books and the non-verbal arts, such as paintings and monuments), as well as norms which provide shared cultural reference points.10 Nora’s conception of historical memory has been criticized as a postmodern approach to history that “reduces the memory of the past to the history of images.”11 I consider this criticism too simplistic and instead argue that Różewicz’s text, which shows a similar approach to historical memory, does not simply compare memory to an archival data bank. Rather, his work stresses memory’s dependence on recorded material while also conversing with the canon of cultural literacy, thereby critically showing that such a canon does not exist in a vacuum but is institutionally (and thus politically and culturally) fashioned.12
In his conception of memory, Nora alludes to key ideas found in Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory. Halbwachs’ understanding of memory is sociological, thus opposed to the idea of memory as a purely subjective phenomenon—the latter conception voiced, for example, by the nineteenth-century philosopher Henri Bergson. Halbwachs links the act of remembering to the repository of images which comprise the social relations in which individuals partake. Nora presents a similar view, yet his notion of memory is broader. For him, geographical places, historical figures, architecture and monuments, artistic objects, and symbols can embody the historical consciousness of a particular social group or a nation. He defines the expression *lieu de mémoire* as “any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.” He also expands the concept of an archive to include all objects of material representation that sustain contemporary memory. Różewicz’s poetic works treat the concept of the archive just as broadly; however, as I argue in my third chapter, Różewicz, like Jacques Derrida, considers the archive to be not so much a question of the past, but one of the future. As Derrida contends, the archive relates to “the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.” I suggest that, for the poet as for the philosopher, it is the death drive that drives the archive. The death instinct or death drive may be interpreted, on the one hand, simply as the “limit experience ‘that I am going to die’,” yet it may also be interpreted as that which “is underneath the work of doing justice to the memory of others’ deaths or the death of the other.” Moreover, Różewicz, much like Derrida, questions the archiving process, since he stresses that the archive, as writing, as image, as object, or institution or monument—all functioning as prosthesis, “produces as much as it records the event (…); this archivization…is also our political experience of the so-called news media.” Thus, Różewicz prompts his readers to delve into the complexities of plural archived memories, to question and compare stories, to reread and contrast narratives of public and private pasts, and, finally, to reread him, reread his earlier texts and tropes which, profoundly overused, have reached a similarly clichéd status as so many Holocaust images.

Różewicz in *the professor’s knife* concentrates on comparable elements of memory (both as material and immaterial objects, tropes, and symbols) which carry the memorial heritage of individuals and/or communities. He shows that cultural memory is unavoidably an institutionally constructed archive dependent on the visibility of a trace. Like Nora, the poet
converses with this canon of shared cultural literacy. Yet, while at the core of Nora’s memory project lies the question of national memory, Różewicz is far from employing a national perspective. He emphasizes that prosthetic memory is frequently a product of memories collected in an ad hoc fashion through the consumption of both a historical literature and a popular media culture which transcend national boundaries, embracing a global or cosmopolitan form. Moreover, Różewicz does not uncritically embrace this form of prosthetic memory, but instead acknowledges its mode of operation, and emphasizes that individual memory inevitably exists within it and is influenced by it. In his late works, the poet is increasingly interested in the individual traces we leave on the past, the traces of stories which will remain after our passing, or which we take with us as silences or secrets, thus leaving only partially known truths. In *the professor’s knife*, he focuses on memories of individuals: that of his long-time friend, Professor Porębski, of his acquaintance, artist Alina Szapocznikow, (both of whom were concentration camp survivors), and finally, on his own. He also attends closely to the memory, mystery and dissonance present in the objects that individuals leave behind. As we know, the remembrance and memorialization of the Holocaust cannot be divorced from the story of memorial objects. Bożena Shallcross, in her book *Rzeczy i Zagłada* (2010) (published in English in 2011 as *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture*) asserts that with time, material objects (for instance hair, glasses, clothing, or suitcases) positioned behind glass in display cases, thus musealized, have become the dominant conception of the Holocaust, and consequently also a part of our perspective on modernity writ large. Shallcross also brings our awareness to the simple fact that the Holocaust object is a cultural text; and, from the same perspective, a Holocaust text is also an object. I will return to expound on the notion of Różewicz’s treatment of objects within *the professor’s knife*, as well as to the idea of the text of the poem as an object, a prosthesis, and a trace.

Cultural memory in Różewicz’s view is based on the archive and relies on the visibility of traces. In *the professor’s knife*, the poet alludes to Freud’s famous metaphor of the railway system as a conceptual model for interpretation of the past in memory, but also to the idea of an archive which relies on traces such as images and objects. Różewicz, of course, is not alone here; the German-British author W.G. Sebald utilizes, in his 2001 novel *Austerlitz*, similar topos of the railway (in particular railway stations), trains, and, also in parallel with Różewicz, photography as a tool of memory. While the titular hero of Sebald’s novel, Austerlitz, searches for his origins
as he visits different cities, the text compresses and distorts linear time, eventually bringing the hero to face his double—a child who arrived at the Liverpool Street train station from Prague via Kindertransport, saving him from the Holocaust. One of the opening images in *Austerlitz* is one of a railway station, but throughout the novel there are various references to trains. This is yet another similarity with this topos as used by Różewicz—on the one hand, the trains signal voluntary travel and possible escape; on the other, they are inextricably linked to transportation to extermination camps. In *Austerlitz* and in his *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (On the Natural History of Destruction) (1999), Sebald uses uncaptioned black and white photographs to interrupt his textual prose narrative. Thus, like in Różewicz’s poetic volume, Sebald’s reader also becomes a viewer, this abrupt encounter with another medium impacting the reading of the text. Although Sebald’s narrative in *Austerlitz* is fictional, I would argue that the photographs of train stations or the famed black and white photo of a little boy wearing a cape (supposedly a photo of the hero as a child) have a powerful effect on the reader/viewer. Our more or less accurate or comprehensive set of memories of Holocaust representation are activated as we experience an insistent interplay of narrative, visual image, as well as historical and personal memory.21 Jakob Lothe argues that in both *Luftkrieg und Literatur* and in *Austerlitz*, the visual images confirm and intensify the narratives’ ethical dimension.22 I would argue that in Różewicz’s text, images have a similar role as they intensify and problematize the ethical questions of the narrative.

This, however, is not a rare phenomenon—I am reminded, here, of the use/allusion to a famous photograph by Margaret Bourke-White of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald rendered as a cartoon redrawing in Art Spiegelman’s original three page *Maus* (1972)23; the story of the imaginary missing photo in Ida Fink’s short story “Traces” from the collection *A Scrap of Time* (1987); or the installations and photographs of the French artist Christian Boltanski, all of which explore the interplay of the documentary and archival versus the false, implied, or imaginary. Of course, there could be other, perhaps more poignant similarities traced between Sebald and Różewicz’s narratives by a careful reader, yet my aim here is not to embark on a comparative study of these writers, but merely to point to a similarity of topoi, of visual and mnemonic traces to signal that Różewicz is not alone in his examination of individual and collective historical memory via visual and textual spheres.
The overall structure of Różewicz’s volume may be conceptualized as centered on two main ideas: one is the idea of memory as a material trace utilized within history, commemoration, and experience; the other is the metaphor of the railway as a motif evoking mobility, open-endedness, and connectivity of memory (and conversely as an unbounded structure inevitably amenable to misremembering, forgetting, and silencing). For Freud, particularly in his essay on “Screen Memories” from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the mobility of the railway epitomizes the process of mnemonic narration and interpretation, the latter being, too, a complex and open network of associations and connections. Since there is no “master memory narrative,” memory, like history, is not a reproduction of the past but a “mobile interpretation of what remains in the space of the present.” In Różewicz’s text the personal archive of memory is contingent on the cultural archive, which is read through a series of extended networks that do not come together into a coherent nodal point but remain perpetually incomplete.

The railway in *the professor’s knife* stands also as a commentary on the stock images of cultural memory that came to represent the Holocaust. Although memory may be a system of open railway networks with an infinite possibility of associations, as already mentioned, the Holocaust has become settled in cultural memory as a repetition of the same few iconic images which by now have become de-contextualized clichés. Despite the extensive documentation of the Holocaust, as the historian Sybil Milton has noted, “although more than two million photos exist in the public archives of more than twenty nations, the quality, scope and content of the images reproduced in scholarly and popular literature has been very repetitive.” According to Hirsch the few stock images, recurring as illustrations in textbooks, reproduced on book covers and in films, are: 1) the massive iron gate entrance to Auschwitz I with the “Arbeit macht frei” sign; 2) the train tracks leading into the main guard house to Auschwitz II Birkenau; 3) the camp watchtowers with barbed wire fences; and 4) corpses in enormous mass graves. Różewicz confronts these tropes, which in their endless repetition in effect distance and anesthetize us to the event.

Here, I part company with scholars such as Marianne Hirsch, who claims that repetition of representations of horror do not desensitize or shield us from shock, but rather produces the effect of trauma. She posits that the reduction in the archive in the number of different images, and instead the repetition of only a few, has resulted in their recontextualization by the
postmemorial generation in their artistic works, in effect allowing for a working through of the traumatic past. I claim that Różewicz has far from such an optimistic perspective on the remembrance of the Holocaust, seeing a very real threat in the distancing, anesthetizing, and forgetting symptomatic of Holocaust clichés. As Dan Stone has observed, since the first photos of Auschwitz, the meaning assigned to it has been conveyed through the symbolic framework of the barbed wire, the ramp, and the famous entrance gate—images which are important elements of the camp, yet are “not the camp but only how we wish to keep seeing it.”

2 The knife — reading written testimonies and mysteries of an object

2.1 Avoiding emotion: the focus on the object

The main image of Różewicz’s poetic volume— the knife— appears simultaneously in the volume’s title and as a photograph on its cover; however, the lyrical subject begins to speak about the object only in section IV of the poetic cycle. The poet does not hide his continued fascination with this object, yet its delayed introduction also suggests a dose of uneasiness or reluctance of the poet as he approaches it as a topic. As the text suggests, Różewicz has been examining and speaking with his friend Mieczysław Porębski (the knife’s owner) about it for over half a century, though crucial aspects of the past have also been avoided or silenced in the context of this lifelong friendship. It is noteworthy that although Różewicz thought about writing the knife’s story for many years, only now, at the end of his existential and poetic journey, does he decide to confront this topic. The poet takes the iconographic image and the object itself from the sphere of the private / personal archive. Paradoxically, by representing the authentic material object via a photograph, Różewicz mediates the testimony of the object, and by inserting it into his own private archive (his poetic text), now intended for public consumption (ergo, it is now in the cultural archive), he ensures its wider and lasting existence. Participating in Porębski’s testimony as an interlocutor, he appropriates an element of his friend’s private experience and memory into his own textual archive. However, we need to remember that the poet is more than
just an interlocutor of another’s recollections; he is the focalizer of these memories and a lyrical
voice who uses his friend’s story for his own narrative purposes.

I propose that the treatment of this object-symbol in the professor’s knife is characterized by a
prominent aesthetic choice which Różewicz repeatedly makes in his poetics: that is, the focus on
the image/object rather than a description of emotions. Throughout the poet’s long career,
many critics have commented on this feature of Różewicz’s style. One of the early critics, Jan
Błoński in his book Poets and Others (Poeci i inni, 1956) remarked that the poet “utilizes ‘atoms
of speech’ [and] instead of naming emotions, […] uses ‘words-objects’, as if his attention were a
beam of light which illuminates the objects from darkness.” Kazimierz Wyka described this
slightly differently. He claimed that “the iconographic material resulting from Różewicz’s
imagination is reminiscent of an old childish play with pictorial blocks.” Różewicz’s readers no
doubt remember a famous poem anthologized in many Polish language and literature textbooks
to which Błoński’s description of Różewicz’s style applies very well. In “Pigtail” (“Warkoczycyk”),
written in 1948, the poet’s attention, as if it were “a beam of light,” illuminates a child’s pigtail
from a heap of hair, the remains of Holocaust victims. Różewicz supposedly had written
“Pigtail” after visiting the museum in Auschwitz. In that poem, he does not describe emotions,
focusing solely on a trace (the materiality of hair left in the museum’s glass expository cases).
Although the poet’s attention focuses on a single braid of hair—on an individual trace— that his
eyes pick out of the mass of hair, he does not imagine an individual biography or ownership
beyond that of a brief anecdote. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, it is with this braid of hair that the
power of the poem lies. He writes:

Behind clean glass / the stiff hair lies / of those suffocated in gas chambers / there are
pins and side combs / in this hair / The hair is not shot through with light / is not parted
by the breeze / is not touched by any hand / or rain or lips / In huge chests / clouds of dry
hair / of those suffocated / and faded plait / a pigtail with a ribbon / pulled at school / by
naughty boys.

In “Warkoczycyk”, we move from the collective, musealized object stockpiled in glass displays to
the focus on an individual braided strand. The life of a child that the poet ascribes to that
“object” (hair) is conveyed by means of only a fleeting impression.
Roughly sixty years after the publication of “Pigtail”, Porębski’s knife, seen as a trace object, functions much differently than the titular object of that poem. The knife has a particular owner, a survivor, and is related to a particular biography. It is as much a symbol of past trauma as a symbol of a life lived after survival. In the professor’s knife, the image of the object serves as a documented trace of the past; it converses with the reader’s iconographic and textual cultural memories, and highlights the palimpsest nature of remembering. The image of the knife is both a trace of the past and itself an object of testimony which holds the memories of past events. To the uninitiated observer, the photograph of the knife remains a mystery, much like the object itself was a mystery and remained a “Columbus’ egg” to the poet for many years. Now parts of its testimony are revealed and turned into a text. As a trace it highlights the performative nature of remembering by not only triggering the lyrical subject’s recalling of the past whenever he comes into contact with the object, but also by suggesting that our psychology frequently, like a knife, cuts out certain memories to either repress, forget and silence them, or, conversely, cuts them out in an attempt to unearth, confront, assemble and bring them into order with other memories of the past.

The particular knife seen on the cover of Różewicz’s volume was made in secret in a concentration camp, and is an object which maintained its secrets for many years. As the poet confesses, he has been meaning to write about this knife for over half a century. Perhaps the metamorphosis of the object itself has prompted him to finally commit its story to paper. The poet observes that, like everything else, including personal memory, objects also are threatened by the destructive forces of time and by forgetting—“Robigus coats the short knife / with rust / and slowly consumes it.”^34^ However, it is also the urgency of the failing memory of those living, or the threat that the secrets their memory holds will perish with their departure from the world of the living which is what prompts the poet to finally commit the mystery of the knife to text. Robigus, whom the poet terms the “demon of rust” and of passing time and forgetting, first takes away and later devours the memories of details of those that are closest to us. Różewicz, indeed, does not reveal emotions about death and dying in words, yet conveys them through images. The owner of the knife, Mieczysław, “was left on his own” since his wife, Hania, “passed away five years ago.”^35^ When the two friends visit her grave, this most private of conversations about the professor’s deceased wife does not appear in Różewicz’s text. However its essence, which conveys the fear of departing memory, is present in the text as a series of images: “Robigus the
rust demon / covers the past with rust / covers words and eyes / the smiles / of the dead / the pen.”

Perhaps the existential fear of the time of aging and mortality, both in the sense of physical mortality, but also in terms of failing memory, and the ending of one’s creativity (hence “pen”), is what prompts the poet to finally undertake this mnemonic journey. Also, the poet suggests that rust covers the pen while it is not in use, when it is unable or perhaps unwilling (or both) to write, thus at a time when the tool is not fulfilling the “duty of its vocation.” It is this responsibility, the duty to the stories of others that Różewicz has continually responded to in his oeuvre.

Apart from the object itself, which enters the poet’s textual archive in the form of a photograph, Różewicz also cites Porębski’s words from a letter in which his friend referred to the history of his knife:

Mieczysław: I thought some more / about that knife of mine / made from the hoop of a barrel. / It was kept in the hem / of your striped prison uniform, / because they confiscated things / and it could cost you dearly... / And so its function / was not only practical / but much more complex / (we should talk about it some more).../.37

Regardless of whether this is an actual citation from a letter written by Porębski that exists in the poet’s personal archive or whether this is just a mystification, such an approach to the presentation of the knife’s history is reminiscent of the quasi-documentary approach that we have seen, for instance, in Matka Odchodzi (1999). However, the paradox is that the reader never learns the history of the knife to a greater degree than what is offered in the aforementioned lines. The reader of Różewicz’s volume never learns what, beyond its practical functions, were these “much more complex” aspects alluded to. Porębski says that they should return to this issue at some point, but they never do, or at least Różewicz’s reader is not privy to this conversation.

One might only assume that the object’s unnamed function may have had something to do with the knife’s symbolism as an object of power and defiance. As a symbol in the public cultural archive, a knife is one of the oldest domestic tools and weapons used by man; it is also a symbol of power and law.38 Confronting the iconographic image of the knife as it is shown in the photograph with the symbolic existence of this trope in western culture, Różewicz highlights the absurdity of its traditional practical and symbolic functions within the context of its historical existence. The knife represents law, and can be both domestic tool and weapon—all of these notions, as they exist within the public cultural archive, testify to the preposterous existence of
the professor’s knife within its historical context. The poet claims that with the Holocaust, as a society, we have morally returned to the iron epoch of primitive hand-made tools. As a weapon, the diminutive knife could possibly function only in a one-on-one encounter. As a symbol, however, it conveys the situation of a defenseless individual, who undoubtedly has the law of ethics on his side, yet is faced with the structured efficiency of a Nazi murder machine that disqualifies him as an opponent. Simultaneously, the possession of such a knife in the reality of a concentration camp gave the individual the greatest power and defiance one could have within the context of that overdetermined reality. This little object defied the subordination of one’s life to another’s power – although these functions are never named, it is obvious that the knife could be used as a means of self-annihilation, thus placing the most important aspect of one’s existential choice, that of the continuation or not of one’s own life, in its owner’s hands.

2.2 The knife on the worktable: (un)usual and ordinary contexts

The further the reader gets into the professor’s knife, the more convincing it becomes that the actual story of the object is missing from the text. We learn that the professor “with the knife in the camp / [was] cutting bread dividing it up.” Is this the central mystery of the story of this object? However, this trope of a knife in Różewicz’s text opens up a wide array of intertexts alluding both to personal, textual memory, and to the cultural memory of the Holocaust, a domain which the poet builds around the motif of the knife. In section VI of the poema, entitled “The last century” (“Ostatni wiek”), Różewicz cites from Ovid’s Metamorphosis, prompting his reader to assume that his creative method is similar to the Latin poet. Różewicz turns the citation of Ovid, in Anna Kamińska’s translation, into a stanza of his own poem:

The iron age was last / truth shame and honour vanished / in their place were / fraud
deceit trickery violence / and pernicious desires / the land once common to all (…) / was marked out to its fullest boundaries / by cunning man…/ Now harmful iron appeared / and gold more harmful than iron...

At the time of writing this, the poet has already dealt with the “metamorphosis” of Holocaust gold in his 1999 volume, zawsze fragment. With Recycling, he returns to this theme. In the professor’s knife, in mock-epic style, he constructs the history of the world, focusing on the
twentieth century, shown through the metamorphosis of images, where the event of the Holocaust is the defining experience of memory. The knife functions as a pretext or a reoccurring motif that Róžewicz is using to connect the memories of his own existential, intellectual, and creative life experiences. Some of these contexts become apparent when the lyrical subject comments on his fascination with the knife at various times during his long acquaintance with the professor:

I saw it for the first time / on the Professor’s desk / in the middle of the 20th century / […] ‘strange knife’ I thought- // […] it lay between Matejko and Rodakowski / between Kantor Jaremianka and Stern / between sheets of paper / between Alina Szapocznikow //

[…] ‘strange knife’ I thought / I took it in hand / laid it down again // (…) another twenty years went by (…) ‘strange knife’ I thought / it lay between a book on cubism / and the end of criticism // […] in Poland there was the memorable “March” / the March of ‘let writers stick to writing!’ / someone caused me to stop writing… / Mietek was in the hospital on Szaserów Street // the knife lay on some newspapers // at the airport I read the slogans / writers stick to writing Zionists go home […]41

Of course, this is a “strange knife” in more than only the aesthetic sense. The primitive knife “from the iron age / […] from a death camp”42 is presented among prominent names of wide cultural significance. Placed among historical and critical books on art on the professor’s desk, this artifact of Holocaust trauma is physically and symbolically inserted into the realm of high culture. It is a paradoxical trace of the past, because, due to its physical aesthetics, it fits among the unwritten testimonies, such as urns, tools, coins, painted or sculpted images, or funerary objects that are the usual targets of archeology.43 Yet, despite its primitive appearance, no one had to excavate this knife from antiquity. It was created in the mid- twentieth century, and in terms of temporal sequence, it belongs among the cultural traces that surround it. Róžewicz may implicitly be alluding to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s 1944 book Dialectic of the Enlightenment, in which the Frankfurt school theorists argue for the failure of the Enlightenment, most traumatically shown in the events of the Holocaust. Róžewicz refers to a wide range of tropes from within the cultural memory: from nineteenth century painters, the artistic movements of the Avant-garde, to the Kraków Group of painters who became the poet’s colleagues once he began his studies at the Jagiellonian University.

Here, the poet refers to an artistic and intellectual formation that had a great impact on his youth and represented his first contacts with the world of art. Through the personal memory of
Porębski’s table (be it real or imagined), Różewicz might be constructing the context for the knife out of his own memory of meetings with this group of people, which included Porębski. In creating such synthesis within the context of the professor’s table, Różewicz alludes also to Porębski’s professional interests as an art historian and to the texts that comprise his oeuvre. Although he does not name titles, but instead imprecisely recalls “a book on cubism” or “the end of criticism”, it does not escape the reader’s attention that Porębski is an author of a book on Matejko’s paintings or titles to which Różewicz’s lyrical subject alludes, such as *Cubism: An Introduction to XX c. art* (1966) or *A Farewell to Criticism* (1966). The lifelong friendship between Różewicz and Porębski had its beginnings after the war, when Różewicz enrolled to study art history at the Jagiellonian University. The biographies of the poet and the art critic share many points of commonality, including the fact that the two men are of the same age (both Porębski and Różewicz were born in 1921). One of the friends, however, is a survivor of Auschwitz, whereas the poet, who was an AK (Home Army) soldier, does not share this traumatic experience. The knife seems to be a mediating object that allows Różewicz to partially enter the memories of his friend’s experience; yet it is simultaneously an object which retains many of its mysteries. Neither Porębski nor Różewicz fully discloses the story of the knife. The knife is an object of prosthesis—for its owner, for Różewicz, and for the reader. Positioned on the desk, it is seemingly useless (the lyrical subject hypothesizes that Porębski may be using it to open envelopes, or as a paper weight). The knife becomes a gadget of prosthetic memory, in Baudrillard’s sense of an object-gadget, where the object of consumption loses “its objective function (as a tool) to the benefit of its function as a sign … [and] is characterized by a kind of functional uselessness (since what is consumed is precisely something other than the ‘useful’).”44 It is the knife as a sign of another’s experience of trauma and life after it that is consumed and functions as a prosthesis in Różewicz’s volume. Yet, the details of Porębski’s camp experience, and the particularities of the knife’s context, are absent. The lyrical subject merely speculates that his friend “probably uses it to open envelopes / and in prison / he peeled potatoes / or shaved with it.”45

The knife, however, functions also as prosthesis for the turbulent events of Polish postwar history and sheds some light on Polish-Jewish relations after the war. In doing so, it marks a drastic difference from the context established for the pigtail in “Warkoczyk.” The knife is more than an object of testimony of trauma; it is also a symbol of life lived post-trauma in the
twentieth century. Its contexts are the professor’s life’s work and accomplishments, but also Neil Armstrong landing on the moon, the events of March 1968 in Poland, and Różewicz’s own personal difficulties. Describing the neighbouring context of books among which the knife is positioned on the table, the lyrical subject recalls: “it was 1968…1969 / a human set foot on the moon (...) / in Poland there was the memorable “March” / the March of ‘let writers stick to writing!’ / someone caused me to stop writing… /at the airport I read the slogans / writers stick to writing Zionists go home”

In recalling March 1968, Różewicz refers to popular party slogans of the time such as: “Pisarze do pióra” (Writers stick to writing), while also calling to mind the famous slogan “Studenci do nauki” (Students stick to learning). The impulse of the student protests which began in Warsaw in 1968 was the taking down from the program of the National Theatre Adam Mickiewicz’s nineteenth century drama “The Forefathers’ Eve” (“Dziady”), directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, for its emphasis on what the authorities perceived as anti-Russian aspects. After its final performance, the students took to the streets, demanding the reinstatement of the play and protesting censorship. Responding to these events and the consequent repressions against the protesters, the Union of Polish Writers proclaimed a resolution condemning the cultural politics of the Gomułka government. Although the student protests of March 1968 are often compared to student protests in the West, the Polish events can be compared truly only to the reform and protests taking place in Czechoslovakia as the Czechs and Slovaks lacking democratic freedoms struggled for the same goals and values as the Poles, whereas in the West, the protests were directed against a different (democratic) state system while the people’s freedom of speech and assembly was not in question. Moreover, unlike the protesters in the West, Polish students struggling to liberalize and democratize the communist system could not count on accurate portrayal of their activities in the press due to state control over mass media and ever-present communist propaganda.

The March events in Poland were also an attack on the intelligentsia, as many well-respected people of culture (artists, authors, and scientists) were viciously attacked in the media, and had their moral and ideological authority as well as professional qualifications undermined. Lastly, the spring of 1968 is also remembered for its shameful anti-Semitic campaign disguised by the authorities as a form of “anti-Zionism.” What began with an anti-Israeli policy (the party
authorities condemned the Israeli aggressors and proclaimed solidarity with the Arab nations after the Israeli-Arab Six-Day war of 1967) quickly turned into an anti-Jewish campaign. The words “Zionism” and “Zionist,” which Różewicz recalls were repeated at that time in countless meetings and propaganda publications denoting no particular form of nationalism, but simply meant “Jew” even if the person labelled “Zionist” was not Jewish (the anti-Zionist campaign was directed against Poles as well.) Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the party, gave the Middle East conflict a Polish spin, proclaiming that “Israel’s aggression in the Arab countries met with applause in Zionist circles of Jews -Polish citizens;” he then urged those Polish citizens to emigrate. Jerzy Eisler suggests furthermore that by mid-decade, the Polish Ministry of the Interior had already started showing “interest” in the Jewish community, although by then only 30,000 Jews or people of Jewish heritage lived in Poland. Spring 1968 marked the expulsion of Jews from public life (from the party, government offices, armed forces, mass media, the educational system and academic communities). The authorities encouraged a wave of emigration through the distribution of one-way destination travel documents. Between 1968 and 1972, 15,000 people emigrated from Poland, most of them intellectuals. Różewicz, with cryptic yet poignant phrases, “memorable March”, “writers stick to writing, Zionists go home,” unearths the intricacies of the historical as well as personal memory of this time period. I believe Eisler’s comment, that looking back on March 1968, observers focus on whatever aspects of the events impacted them the most, or on the group of people they kept company with, is fitting to Różewicz’s approach as well. The poet does not give any specific details apart from the well-known slogans to open the memory of these events to each reader’s recollection. Rather, when recalling 1968 he adopts a tone of self-mockery: “Aleksander Małachowski / asked me to do a TV interview / I spoke about how that step / the human footprint on the moon / would change the world and its people …. I was naïve.” Then, he cryptically adds: “someone caused me to stop writing.”

With the last phrase Różewicz is probably referring to the period post 1968 when his poetic oeuvre was marked by a notable silence. While the time of 1956 through the early 1970s was a prolific time for Różewicz (he published numerous volumes during this period, including poetry, such as “Poemat Otwarty” (1956), “Formy” (1958), “Twarz trzecia” (1968), “Regio” (1969)); short stories and mini-novels, including “Moja córeczka” (1966) and “Śmierć w starych dekoracjach” (1970); essays, “Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego” (1971); and plays,
including “Kartoteka” (1960) and “Stara kobieta wysiaduje” (1968), the later 1970s became a period of crisis, especially in terms of poetry. After “Regio” (1968), Różewicz comes back to poetry only in 1991, with the publication of “Plaskorzeźba.” Tadeusz Drewnowski ascribes this poetic silence to the real-life historical and political climate, and clearly divorces it from what later became known as a “poetics of silence” in Różewicz’s poetry. Although this is also the time when Różewicz was viciously attacked by fellow writers and critics (he did not join the political opposition which formed in the mid-70s), Drewnowski claims that it was, rather, the political situation at the time in Poland, so serious, yet so unpredictable, that made Różewicz feel helpless, paralyzing him as a writer. I would argue instead that it was more than the political climate which was responsible for Różewicz’s silence. The phrase “któż mi złamal pióro” (“someone caused me to stop writing”) bears evidence of a more personal incident or a series of incidents which the author recalls. In all fairness, Drewnowski does bring up the attacks that Różewicz suffered, including from the following, among others: Zbigniew Herbert (who called Różewicz “the foremost Stalinist in Poland”); Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (who termed him “famous German-eater”), the critic Artur Sandauer who called him a “demoralizer”. There is also the fact that in an Encyclopaedic Guide to Polish literature post-1939, his name was not given an entry at all. Rather than attempting to solve the mystery of who it was precisely that Różewicz had in mind when he included that phrase, I would like to point out that we have seen a similar strategy of not disclosing personal references fully also in Kup kota w worku: work in progress (2008) or in Mother Departs (1999). Moreover, it is once again a strategy of highlighting his own experience and referring to his own oeuvre vis-à-vis Porębski’s knife and the context of his personal and professional experience laid out on his work table.

Focusing on the object of the knife on the professor’s desk, one cannot escape its relationship with other objects of the Holocaust, or other objects which we associate with Holocaust remembrance. Shallcross, in her book Rzeczy i Zagłada (2010), posits that remains of victims, turned objects, such as bones or hair, are a metonymy of the unrepresented body, and speak of its death. Objects playing the role of protagonists take the place of their missing owners; however, a single object (be it a knife, a fountain pen, or a wallet) at times also illustrates in abbreviation large parts of historical process. In the case of the professor’s knife, we have already seen that Różewicz treats it as not only a prosthesis of Porębski’s Holocaust experience, but also utilizes it to illustrate historical and personal events post-trauma within the larger panorama of the
twentieth century. Discussing the various representations of Holocaust objects in literature, Shallcross calls the attention of her readers to a poem written in the Warsaw ghetto by Abram Sutzkever titled “Ladunek butów”, which she interprets as the author’s attempt to cope with an image of chaotic and anonymous mass of shoes he saw transported from Vilnius ghetto to Berlin. She asserts that Sutzkever demands their individualization when he asks: “Gdzie są two stopy?” (Where are your feet?) or “Gdzie jest dziecko, któremu pasowały te buty?” (Where is the child whose [feet] fit those boots?) This attempt at individualization echoes Różewicz’s short anecdotal evocation of a life lived in “Warkoczyk.” However, the professor’s knife seen on his worktable brings to mind still other poems of objects. Shallcross also cites a poem by Władysław Szlegel entitled “Things” (“Rzeczy”), which in my opinion contrasts with Różewicz’s strategy of presenting the context of the knife among other objects on the table quite well. Szlegel writes: “In the abandoned flats / scattered bundles, / suits and comforters, / plates and stools, / fires are still swindling, / idle spoons lie about, / thrown out in a hurry / family photographs…” Shallcross compares the chaos depicted in Szlegel’s poem to the disarray of objects typical of seventeenth century Dutch or Flemish still life paintings where we see places vacated by people, unfinished drinks, scattered cutlery and open books. She asserts that while the chaos is similar, the context is obviously vastly different, and the images of empty spaces after intrusion, arrests, and plunder during wartime are meant to convey the brutality which destroyed the everyday relations of objects and people. One cannot leave this comparison of poetic depictions of objects left behind and plundered without recalling by now a very famous poem by the Polish-Jewish writer, Zuzanna Gincznka (Sara Polina Ginzburg), originally untitled, yet often known by its first Latin verse, the opening lines of an ode by Horace: “Non omnis moriar.” Ginczanka’s poem, which makes overt allusions to the well-known poem entitled “My Last Will” (“Testament Mój”) by the Polish Romantic bard, Juliusz Słowacki, was published at the initiative of Julian Przyboś, a Kraków Avant-garde poet, (and, incidentally, an early supporter of Różewicz) in a weekly periodical called Odrodzenie, in 1946. The poet, who was executed in 1944, wrote her poem in 1942 while in captivity, and in it addresses her betrayer by name:

Non omnis moriar – my proud estate, / Meadows of my tablecloths, fortresses of indomitable wardrobes, / Spacious sheets, precious bedding / And dresses, light dresses will be left after me. // (...) So let your hand ferret out the J things, / Chominowa, of Lwów, brave wife of a snitch, / Sly informer, mother of Volksdeutch. // Kilims and tapestries, serving dishes, candlesticks -- / Let them drink the night through, and at first
light’s dawning / Let them search for precious stones and gold / In couches, mattresses, comforters and carpets.  

The everyday objects in this poem are a testament to ruthless violation of ownership and privacy, and attest also to betrayal. Read post-Holocaust, this description also evokes the plundering of the victim’s bodies for gold and other valuables. The similarity is there, yet the contrast is striking when one compares this violent transgression of objects in Szlegel and Ginczanka’s poems with the disarray of the “still-life” of the professor’s desk in Różewicz. The knife remains unthreatened and present throughout the years on the professor’s desk.

Let us look at the image again. It

lay between Matejko and Rodakowski / between Kantor Jaremianka and Stern / between sheets of paper / between Alina Szapocznikow // (…)/ I took it in hand / laid it down again // another twenty years went by (…)//[…] Mietek was in the hospital on Szaserów Street // the knife lay on some newspapers...  

The professor’s knife lays among books on artists, perhaps also reproductions of their work and other printed material (newspapers), and is thus positioned among both high and popular culture. Yet, similarly to the objects in poems of Szlegel and Ginczanka marking the absence of owners, it also, at least on one occasion, marks the absence of its owner, Porębski. The stasis of objects in disorder in the Flemish still-lifes that Shallcross recalls is the freezing of people’s “last touch” laid on these everyday items. In Różewicz we see a comparable motif of premonition and perhaps fear of such a “last touch” when the professor is in a hospital undergoing a potentially life-threatening operation, and it is the poet present in his apartment, contemplating the knife. On the other hand, if Porębski indeed keeps the knife on his work table and opens envelopes with it, then the object’s traumatic history had become subsumed within the normalcy of everyday life and experience. Having entered the realm of banal everyday reality, the object will nonetheless, however, with its past secrets, one day survive its owner.

Finally, the knife is a trope that links Różewicz’s present everyday existence, including its banal aspects such as eating breakfast, with a life-long friend (Porębski). Their conversations about boiling eggs and eating too much bread or salt refer to the memory of his earlier textual existence in well-known and repeatedly cited lines of his early poetry. In a section entitled “Columbus’ Egg” (“Jajko Kolumba”), which includes a breakfast scenario, a knife, although not directly
named, is present: “years later Mieczysław and I / are sitting at breakfast / the 20th century is
ending // I cut bread on a board / spread butter / add a pinch of salt (...).”67 Różewicz no doubt
wants his readers to recall that in 1956 in “In the midst of life” (“W śródku życia”) from Poemat
otwarty, he wrote: “the knife is used for cutting bread / people feed on bread.”68 The motif of a
knife used to cut bread— one of the uses of Porębski’s knife while he was a prisoner in a
concentration camp—is found in the same context in Różewicz’s earlier poetry. In “W śródku
życia” Różewicz’s lyrical subject was attempting to reclaim ordinary reality and ethics by re-
learning and affirming the most basic and banal of acts. At the end of the twentieth century, in
the professor’s knife, these functions no longer have to be reclaimed or asserted. To the old poet,
slicing bread is no longer marked with ethical and existential doubts; it is a banal activity.
Ordinary life in post-Holocaust reality, even to those who lived through it or witnessed it and
carry its traumas, is possible. Różewicz fully accepts and embraces this possibility, yet rejects
the tolerance of forgetting or dismissing the importance of historical memory. The professor’s
knife is also about archiving personal memory and history which can also be elusive. Hence, in
this text, in which his private archive turns into cultural memory, he struggles against the
“Robigus / who in antiquity / ate metals / - though he never touched gold - / consumes keys / and
locks / swords plowshares knives / guillotine blades axes / rails…”69 Robigus here is a
destructive force of chronos that adds countless screens of images and nets of cultural references
to our memory of the past. Różewicz discloses that he has been promising himself to write about
his friend’s knife for many years, and that finally fulfilling his promise now might be in fact
prompted by the destructive force of Robigus and chronos, knowing that the story of the
individual experience will undoubtedly disappear along with the passing of its owner.

Linking the knife (a symbol of Porębski’s individual experience) with tropes of his own earlier
textual archive, Różewicz may be mourning in advance the passing of a lifelong friendship. As
Baudrillard contests, one should cast aside the myth that “man prolongs himself in his objects.”70
However, “the object is that by which we mourn ourselves [and others]—in the sense that it
represents our own death, but transcended (symbolically) because we possess it.”71 The knife as
an object present in the title of a poetic cycle and as a photo on the cover of the volume becomes
an individual “monument” to a friend that is meant as much to mourn in advance as to
commemorate. It is also possible that the knife on Porębski’s work table helps him to mourn the
others who shared with him the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, but did not survive.
Perhaps Porębski does not allow himself to forget that reality, even years later when he has become a respected and successful academic and sits surrounded by the comfort of books in his study. In this sense, mourning would be a repeated act of the everyday ordinariness, since the knife for Porębski exists within this ordinary sphere of everyday objects and actions. For Różewicz, however, this particular knife remains an object outside of ordinary everyday reality. It is, rather, a textual symbol of experience that he was fortunate enough to have missed. After all, Różewicz’s poema is figuratively captured, positioned in-between two photographs—the knife on the front cover, and the Yad Vashem memorial to Holocaust victims on the back folio. It is thus positioned between the trace of another’s individual experience and the musealized trace of the experience of millions who perished. This “in between” position connects the knife with the image of the train wagons, an image which I will elaborate on in the next section.

3 Train wagons—public monument versus individual memory

3.1 Objects threatened by rust

In Różewicz’s poetry various metal objects such as keys, locks, swords, knives, and train tracks are subjected to the same fate of destruction by “the demon of rust” and forgetting. With this list, Różewicz connects not only the tools that were the weapons of history, but also well-known Freudian metaphors and symbols of memory, traumatic memory, and memory repressed in the unconscious (keys, locks, and train tracks). Years earlier, Różewicz used a similar strategy in The Trap (“Pułapka”) (1982), a play about Franz Kafka. In that text, through establishing a network of associations between teeth, hair, wardrobes, and a wagon, Różewicz connects Kafka’s character to the Holocaust. In the professor’s knife the poet uses the images of train tracks and trains as metaphors for mnemonic recall. Since track and train images are the most typical iconographic representations of the Holocaust, Różewicz picks up on this motif to show that his own private archive of memory inevitably interweaves with these stock images prevalent in places that document and commemorate the Holocaust. Andreas Huyssen, in his book Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia (1995), posits that sites of commemoration
such as the museum, the memorial, or the monument undeniably shape public memory.\textsuperscript{72} The critic argues that the power of the museum or the monument arises from its material quality, which the television screen, the internet, or unmediated, personal reminiscence cannot provide.\textsuperscript{73} This claim counters Alison Landsberg’s argument that affect evoked by mass culture technologies such as the immaterial screen image of the cinema or a computer as well as historical narrative encountered via a visit to a museum exhibit have equal significance, as both create prosthetic memory and the “imagined communities” which share in this memory. Since contemporary culture is subject to the overbearing presence of the fleeting screen image, an example of simulacrum and immaterial communication, Różewicz does not discount the significance of either the immaterial or the physical object, yet he does not share fully Landsberg’s optimism about the positive potential of prosthetic memory. In focusing on the image of the train, Różewicz enters a field of imagery from various geographical, temporal, and cultural contexts that come to life in his mind. He writes: “Freight trains / cattle cars / the color of liver and blood / long strings / crammed with banal Evil / [...] they end their flight / in a fiery oven / [...] the train ends / its journey / turns into / a monument.”\textsuperscript{74} The poet here refers to all of the images of the train present in his personal memory, the stock images of trains and railways used in the representation of the Holocaust, as well as the actual monument in the form of a train wagon dedicated to the memory of Holocaust victims in Yad Vashem.

Simultaneously, on the back cover of the poetic volume, he directs his readers to the photograph of the Yad Vashem monument, an object which is in fact not so much monument as counter-monument.\textsuperscript{75} It does not belong to the tradition of the monument erected as a mark of heroic celebration and a figure of triumph. Rather, it is a memorial of suffering and a condemnation of crimes against humanity. In the poet’s verse, the image of the train from the past arising in his memory is of the colour of blood and animal organs. The verse “long strings” pertains both to the length of the train itself (the number of its wagons) and the deposit of the bodies that are packed inside its walls. This association is evident in the Polish original because the poet uses the word “składy,” which translates as “accumulation” or “deposits.” The cattle wagons are “crammed with [the victims of] banal evil”; this phrase refers to the perpetrators of the Final Solution.\textsuperscript{76} In Różewicz’s memory, the train wagons fly by in a hurry to end up at the crematoria (“they end their flight / in a fiery oven /”\textsuperscript{77}). The process of the transition of the actual cattle wagons into a Holocaust monument is equally fast (“the train ends / its journey / turns into / a monument.”)\textsuperscript{78}
The historical time of the transport and the temporal distance between the occurrence of the Holocaust and its commemoration as a monument is treated in Różewicz’s text as a split second association within one’s memory. However, this split second association does not eliminate the durée of chronos which loads the poet’s psyche with a net of images and cultural texts.

The Holocaust monument from Yad Vashem shown on the volume’s back folio leads the poet to consider multifarious trains, with various origin and destination points, housed in different historical times, and depicted in different cultural texts. There is “the stone train / (…) over the abyss,” (the gold train that “toward the end of the war / (…) left Hungary,” as well as “the Inter Regnum – a train / to Berlin.”79 The trip on the “Inter Regnum” to Berlin is probably closest in temporality to the poet’s present. The train’s last wagon could also be referred to as “the interregnum”, thus a period-space in-between the past and the present, or the space / route / time already travelled and that which is still ahead. Traveling on that train, Różewicz reads one of his favourite poets—the late Romantic, Cyprian Norwid: “I open my book / a poem by Norwid / I am building / a bridge / to link the past / with the future / The past is today, / but a little further on... .” 80 Citing a verse from Norwid instantly directs his reader to the famous poem from Norwid’s Vade Mecum (1858-65) titled “The Past.” Its first stanza illuminates Różewicz’s take on the past, memory, and responsibility as follows: “Death, pain, the past, are not God’s / But his who breaks the laws; / So – he can’t bear the days;/ And sensing evil, wants remembrance spurned!81

In Norwid’s view, rejecting remembering implies fault, the breaking of an ethical law. The responsibility for the past weighs on the present, and in light of Norwid’s poem, Różewicz’s lyrical subject counts himself among those responsible for the past, and thus also responsible for preserving memory. In contemporary reality, however, memory is threatened by the gullibility of mass media simulacra. There are those, of course, who, like the perpetrators of historical crimes, would like to forget certain aspects of historical collective memory. Such is the case with the gold train which “toward the end of the war / (…) left Hungary.”82 Those who might be able to tell its story are unwilling to testify: “American officers / mixed up in the Affair / they knew nothing / had heard nothing / besides they’re dying off.”83 Lacking traces, this train adopts a mythical aura. Here a factual historical crime is catalogued in an archive of collective memory among the myth, rumour, and hearsay: “gold trains amber rooms / sunken continents / Noah’s
Naturally Różewicz ironically scrutinizes the “mythical mysteries” of this train, yet in this instance the poet is not an archivist – investigator. His reader never learns whether a document of the train’s schedule exists; however the reader who, like Różewicz, reads daily newspapers, would know that with his reference to the “gold train”, the poet clearly refers to news which resurfaced in the press in 2001. The Gold Train at the end of the war left Hungary and was destined for the Third Reich, yet it never made its destination. The news of the Hungarian gold train resurfaces in the international press again in 2001 as a result of a lawsuit launched in May of that year by Hungarian victims of the Holocaust and their heirs against the US government seeking compensation for personal property seized, confiscated and stolen by the Nazi Hungarian government. The items were shipped west on a train, which, after the war, was accepted into custody by the US army on or on approximately May 11, 1945 near Werfen, Austria and later moved to Salzburg, Austria. The lawsuit claims that the US government did not openly respond to either the postwar Hungarian government or a delegation of Hungarian Jews seeking information about these belongings, and made no effort to return the assets, valued at more than $1 billion in modern dollars. In 2005 a settlement was reached in the amount of USD $21 million in the form of a Settlement Fund disbursed to qualified social service agencies and for the benefit of social programs for eligible Hungarian Nazi victims, with $500,000 of the Fund to be used by a recipient institution (e.g. a museum) for an archival collection of documents and artifacts for educational purposes and scholarly research. The settlement did not provide direct payments to Class Members as compensation for property lost, and moreover, many of the survivors did not live long enough to see the verdict in the case, while those who are not already deceased are in now in their nineties. I believe that Różewicz wants to document and highlight not only the scandal that once again surfaced in the press, but also comment on the shameful unwillingness of individuals and governments to admit to their crimes. Although restitution has finally taken place, it is a largely political gesture that does not play a significant role in the lives of the wronged individuals.

Focusing on the other train in the form of a monument at Yad Vashem, Różewicz questions also our contemporary culture of commemoration. The Yad Vashem monument is volatile, as it can
be “brought to life by cries / of hatred / from racists nationalists / fundamentalists / [and it may] 
(…) crush like an avalanche / onto humanity / not onto ‘humanity’! // onto people.”

Różewicz is referring to the visual image of the monument itself on the volume’s back folio. We see the train wagon positioned above ground on tracks that end mid-air, thus creating a feeling of uneasiness in the viewer. Undoubtedly, this reflection points to the catastrophic vein in Różewicz’s worldview. If the stone train comes crushing down, Różewicz claims, the catastrophe will fall on humanity, yet most importantly, on the individual person. The verse “like an avalanche / onto humanity / not onto ‘humanity’! // onto people” in the original Polish reads: „jak lawina / na ludzkość / nie na ‘ludzkość’! // na człowieka.” While Bill Johnston has translated the Polish “na człowieka” in the plural as “onto people”, it is possible to translate it as “onto men” or “onto man”, thus playing on the ambiguity of the Polish singular “człowiek.” I would argue that Różewicz’s priority in the professor’s knife is foremost the self-reflexivity of one’s individual memory with awareness of its dependence on and influence by outside prosthesis such as the images and stories encountered on TV, on the cinema screen, and various sites of memory (the museum, the monument). Here the focus on individual memory and subjectivity standing in contrast to the collective once again links the images of Holocaust trains of collective cultural memory to the individual perception of these images, and also individual memories of train travel. This time when discussing the different trains, Różewicz makes a covert reference to his friend, Porębski. Różewicz’s poetic text and real or imaginary individual experience of travel on the train to Berlin (with its reference to the “interregnum”) connects semantically to Porębski’s experience (here his textual output as a critic). It might be a pure coincidence or a link imposed on the text by Różewicz’s overzealous reader that Professor Mieczysław Porębski is the author of a book entitled Interregnum: Studies on the history of Polish 19th and 20th century art (“Interregnum: Studia z historii sztuki polskiej XIX I XX wieku”) (1975). The individual biographical experience of the two friends, the art historian and the poet, meets at the semantic level of language. According to the Oxford English Language Dictionary, which defines “interregnum” as “a period when normal government is suspended, especially between successive reigns or regimes,” the meaning of the interregnum puts the emphasis on the idea of the in-between (of what comes before and its relationship to what follows) in a sequence. This path of interpretation again brings to the fore Nora’s conception of the value of materiality of a trace in historical memory and Freud’s view of memory as an interconnected network of
railways. In Porębski’s title the “Interregnum” is the study of the history of Polish iconography; in Różewicz it is both, possibly a real train and a memory train that leads the lyrical subject into an exploration of palimpsests of memory traces which appear in our memory as iconographic images. It is the in-between of both, of historical and personal memory, individual symbol and cultural *lieu de memoire* that occupy Różewicz’s mind.

Różewicz’s reader questions whether this hidden connection of semantics between the lyrical subject’s individual experience and the title of Porębski’s art [historical] scholarship can constitute evidence for what Ryszard Nycz calls the poetics of “mutually exclusive alternatives” which, according to the critic, characterize Różewicz’s late poetics. Such parataxis structures the whole of the poetic text, Nycz arguing that it “hides the connections between parts, or rather transfers the responsibility of its deciphering onto the reader.” Nycz goes on to claim that Różewicz’s late poetics returns in some aspects to its point of origin where the classic modernist motif of the unwritten (uncreated) work (“*dzielo nienapisane*”) again gains importance. This, however, the critic asserts, is not a creative incapacity, but rather an experience of indecision in the sphere of aesthetic and worldview options, between, as we read in the poem entitled “Poem” (“*Wiersz*”—“I wanted to describe it” and “I don’t want to write it” (“*Chciałem opisać*” and “nie chcę go pisać”)91. In Różewicz’s late oeuvre, the semantics of the multiplicity of meanings brings antinomies of interpretive hypotheses. Różewicz thus leaves the multiplicity of meanings of the “interregnum” to be deciphered by the reader. Similarly, the relationship between the individual trace of traumatic memory (the knife) and the trace associated with its collective nature (the train) is left in silence.

We can approach how Różewicz accomplishes the latter by means of a dialogue with Tomasz Fiałkowski in his book entitled *Critics and Art* (“*Krytycy i sztuka*”) (2004), in which Porębski talks about his knife and Różewicz’s poem:

*My little knife— a keepsake from prisoner’s work on the train tracks – is only a piece of a much larger whole, to which first and foremost, belongs the vision of the train as a transport through time. This poema has for me epic dimensions, because everyone, together with Master Przyboś and our deceased loved ones, appears in it. It is baffling how large of a world was captured in it and how each detail has meaning. This is truly a summa of our lives and the time that was given to us.*93
Undoubtedly, Różewicz is aware that the professor’s knife is a “keepsake” from Porębski’s work on the train tracks as a prisoner of a concentration camp, yet this information is never disclosed to the reader by the lyrical subject in the poem. One can only hypothesize that “na torach” meant labour in maintaining the train tracks, yet this also would have meant keeping the trains going. In this hypothesis however, the reader’s interpretation is biased by the most common iconographic portrayals of prisoners’ work on the train tracks. Here, the reader becomes caught up in the clichéd imaginarium of the Holocaust. Still, the question of what was the role of the professor’s knife in this forced labour remains unanswered in the poem. Różewicz leaves this trace of personal history and trauma as a trace left in silence. This is a tactic that shields the full story of the knife. Perhaps it also shields the most intimate, emotionally charged details of his friend’s experience that Różewicz does not wish to expose. This silence appears whenever Różewicz touches on deeply personal and emotional aspects of someone’s memory, as in the instance when the two friends visit the cemetery and the grave of Porębski’s wife, yet they do not speak directly about her. The story of this object, then, is also an example of Nycz’s notion of the experience of indecision.94

Różewicz does not disclose his friend’s secrets; moreover, he reveals that he did not know the details of Porębski’s imprisonment at the time he wrote his poema. Details emerge later only because Porębski chooses to speak about them during a filmed interview. Only years later, with the publication of a book entitled Wbrew sobie: Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Różewiczem (2011), the reader learns that indeed Porębski was in a commando squad whose task was repairing the train tracks. The aforementioned book contains a transcript from a video recorded by the documentary filmmaker Andrzej Sapia, who is the author of several documentary films on Tadeusz Różewicz. He has recorded the conversation of the two friends (Różewicz and Porębski) while they discuss versions of the poem a few months prior to its publication. The video records a breakfast scenario (with eggs, cheese, jam, and tea, much like the one included in the text of the poem) and a very informal conversation. Porębski says: “When I was in this… Gross Rosen, and later I was in ‘baucug’… this was a kind of Aussenkommando, which fixed the train tracks. When the allies bombed the tracks, then our train went there, and we were fixing that line.”95 On the other hand, Różewicz confesses that he did not know these details and included the motif of the train simply because of the overbearing association of the trains and the transports of the Holocaust: “so this element of the train…about, what you are saying, that you worked on the tracks, I did not know.
This element of the train emerged by itself for me with regard to the fact that you were transported. With regards to transports."^96

3.2 The efficiency of the railway and the Auschwitz gate versus the efficiency of memory and disappearing evil

The Nazi use of the railway system and the efficiency of its network engendered mass death and trauma. The disappearance of historical memory, the forgetting of past events, as well as the possibility of reoccurrence of historical evils keeps Różewicz ethically engaged in the past. In other recent poems published outside of the professor’s knife volume, Różewicz posits that the continued presence of the past puts a heavy burden on the present. It is a burden which may be unwelcome and which the lyrical subject would like to avoid: “at every step / the living ask me / to write ‘something’ ‘a few words’ / about someone who has died / departed passed away // (…) let the dead bury their dead // (…) I have labored too long on the pastures / of your cemeteries Depart now / you dead leave me in peace."^97 He expresses a similar sentiment in a poem without a title: „Again starts / the past // it would be best to go mad / (…) when at last the past / will end.”^98 This however, is the traumatic past that comes back like an unhealed wound.

Yet prosthetic cultural memory may consist of drastically different representations of trauma. Hence the presence of the “banal evil” to which Różewicz repeatedly returns. The “banality of evil” which was a key problem of individual ethics for Arendt, nowadays has reached a diametrically different meaning. Recalling the key clichéd image of Holocaust memory— here, the gate of Auschwitz— Różewicz comments on the fact that currently, evil has become neutralized and is seen as an allegory:

gateway // Lasciate ogni speranza / Voi ch’entrate // all hope abandon / ye who enter here // the inscription at the entrance to hell / in Dante’s Divine Comedy // take heart! / beyond that gateway / there is no hell // hell has been dismantled / by theologians / and psychoanalysts // it has been turned into an allegory / for reasons humanitarian / and educational // (…) two drunken gravediggers / sit by a hole / they’re drinking non-alcoholic beer / snacking on sausage / winking at us / playing soccer / with Adam’s skull / beneath the cross // (…) beyond the gateway / there will be no history / no goodness no poetry // (…) there will be stones // stone / upon stone / upon stone a stone / and on that stone / another / stone."^99
Różewicz seems to believe, as Baudrillard does, that in our modern-day reality we “fall into banality” where the real is replaced by a virtual reality of the dominant schema of simulation and a world of signs. Not only do we exist in the world of simulacra, with its defining characteristics of “immersion, immanence and immediacy,” but also, in this hyperspace of the screen, the image no longer exists and the referent disappears. Within the hyperreal, or, as Baudrillard assesses it, “the post historical flow of informational societies” assembled by the electronic media, traditional notions of causality, perspective, and reasoning, along with “the difference between cause and effect, ends and means, subject and object, active and passive,” are eradicated. Thus, the gate beyond which there is no hell, no history, no good, no poetry in Różewicz might be seen as a gate to the hyperreal, the surface of the screen where the sphere of tragedy coalesces with comedic trivialization and repetition results in reduction to the banal. What will be left beyond this gate, in the absence of history, ethics, aesthetics, one might ask? Różewicz replies: “stones.” As in the biblical signs of the end of the age and a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in the Gospel of Mark (13: 2-3), where no stone will be left standing of the city’s magnificent temples, Różewicz prophesizes: “there will be stones // stone / upon stone / upon stone a stone….”

This biblical allusion corresponds to yet another intertext in the Polish context, namely to Wiesław Myśliwski’s famous novel entitled “Kamień na kamieniu” (Stone upon stone) (1984) as well as to a verse from a Polish folk song which is the epigraph of Myśliwski’s text. Myśliwski’s narrator, who is simultaneously the novel’s hero, says that the aforementioned folk song, with its verse “Kamień na kamieniu, na kamieniu kamień, a na tym kamieniu jeszcze jeden kamień,” which corresponds word-for-word to a segment of Różewicz’s text, is his favourite tune. Stone upon a stone is a novel about the Polish countryside, its people and traditions, thus when Stanisław Burkot comments on Myśliwski’s title, he proposes that the title and associated folk song are evocative of rhythmic and cyclical models of peasant life, as regulated by agrarian work. Thus, on the one hand, we have an allusion to the cyclical time of eternal return; on the other, a different set of contrary meanings and references. The popular expression, “kamień na kamieniu nie pozostanie” (stone upon stone will not remain) denotes destruction and the unrelenting passing of time. In this sense the expression has a meaning which echoes the biblical one, prophesizing the destruction of Jerusalem.
Besides these two antithetical meanings of continuity of eternal return and destruction, “stone upon a stone” also denotes memory. A mound of stone was created by Jacob and Leban as a symbol / covenant of reconciliation (Gen 31:46). Funerary stones, in the past often arranged into a heap, bear similar meanings of remembrance, meant to mark the place where a body has been buried. However, “stone upon a stone” brings to mind also a place of remembrance that has been devastated, its tombstones overturned by vandals. Unfortunately, news of devastated cemeteries do surface in the Polish press (these cemeteries are often, although not exclusively, Jewish). The vicinity and the combination of all of these cultural references and scenes, (i.e. the gate of Auschwitz, Dante’s gate to hell, the Golgotha, the second coming of Christ, the drunken grave diggers echoing the famous scene in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, along with the trivial folk song and the lyrical subject as the prophesizing Christ), point to falling into the banal, the ahistorical, into amnesiac existence. For Różewicz, after the war, the metaphor of the raising of the gothic cathedral from rubble “brick after brick,” in the aesthetic, but more importantly in the ethical, sense, was the most pressing task. Here, the stones have been placed one on top of the other; the task has been accomplished, yet the monument of remembrance has been erected only to be endangered by cyclical eternal return and repetition, threatening to anesthetize and trivialize.

In 2010 Różewicz published Wycieczka do muzeum. Wybór opowiadania. In it are included both dated and undated texts, some originally published as far back as far as 1956, the most recent, in 2004. This volume contains also a short prose text from 1959 with the same title as that of the volume: “Wycieczka do muzeum” (“A trip to the museum”). Różewicz supposedly wrote this short story after he visited the museum at Auschwitz. This narrative does not have a single hero; rather, all of the visitors and guides of the museum are one collective character. It is this character’s reactions that the writer captures in his text. The victims’ unimaginable horrors and deaths have now been turned into books and a catalogue with photos:

A small table stands under a poplar tree. An older woman sits next to it. On the table lie museum guidebooks, books, small albums with reproductions. – It’s an interesting read, buy miss, it can be read, and read. Everything is here: transport out and transport in, suffering, and the burning of corpses. All descriptions. Worth buying. – The woman recommends her items, yet no one somehow is eager to buy.

Furthermore, the visitor to the museum has certain expectations which need to be fulfilled. The remnants of victims and the objects left behind are a spectacle-like attraction. The visitors have
heard stories about the accumulation of hair, and heaps of other objects, and they want to see them. These traces of victim’s bodies and confiscated objects have become reduced to museum curiosa and Różewicz endows the dialogue exchange of the visitors with deep irony:

– Where are the hair, they said that there are hair here, but I don’t see any. Ignas, do you know where are the prosthesis and hair? – What do you need the prosthesis and hair for? When I was here more than ten years ago, everything was here. It was everywhere. (...) Mom, there is nothing here, some kind of museum, I want to go, when are we going to go?107

At the end of Różewicz short story we encounter an image of a train. It is a train which transports the visitors to and from the museum. The narrator describes the scene of the visitor’s departure as follows:

– We have a train in an hour. – Let’s go. And where is Mietka? The electric train was already waiting. People, who were visiting the museum, were taking their places inside the compartments. Little was said about the museum itself. From the direction of the city, one could see smoke from large factories; screams were heard from the soccer field. (...) Two old women sat by the train tracks, white bony goats with pink udders were grazing. (...) A freight train was passing by on the neighbouring track.108

The visitors do not discuss the museum much. The electric train on which they will travel is contrasted with the freight train on the next track. The latter, of course, is meant to evoke the cattle trains which transported prisoners to Auschwitz. The city in the distance with its smoke stacks is no doubt the industrial town of Nowa Huta, yet the smoke is meant to evoke the Nazi industrial machine of extermination and the smoke over Auschwitz. The people on the train seem not to notice these parallels, and life goes on in its regular rhythm for the local people portrayed in the scene. Youngsters play soccer nearby, and old women watch over their goats.

Różewicz’s vision of postmemory and the museum’s function as a site of remembrance and transmission of memory is rather bleak. Moreover, the ending of this short story reminds me of Czesław Miłosz’s famous poem from the volume Ocalenie (“Rescue”) (1945), “Piosenka o końcu świata” (A Song about the end of the world). The importance of Miłosz’s publication cannot be underestimated in the Polish literary canon. For this reason, I suggest that the intertextual reference will not be lost on Różewicz’s readers. In Miłosz’s poem the rhythm of everyday reality is equally undisturbed despite the calamity being inflicted on others simultaneously:
On the day the world ends / Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas, / A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of the lawn, / Vegetable peddlers shout in the street / (...) Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet / Yet is not a prophet, for he’s much too busy, / Repeats while he binds his tomatoes: / No other end of the world will there be, / No other end of the world will there be.\(^{109}\)

In much the same way as in the context of the museum in Różewicz’s poem, the rhythm of everyday banal existence is uninterrupted despite the cataclysm close-at-hand. While in Miłosz the catastrophe is happening in the present, in Różewicz’s short story we are located in postmemory (after the tragedy, examining its archive or musealized traces). His conclusion, however, about the undisrupted rhythm of everyday reality and the indifference of witnesses is comparable. Only the narrator, external to the fabula, calls the reader’s attention to the parallels between the “then” and “now.” As Różewicz’s museum visitors (who are also rendered as the general public since they are largely anonymous characters given random names, lacking deeper characterization) shun this responsibility of observation, the reader is the one who is called upon to have the awareness of Miłosz’s gray haired elderly man.

Does the poet’s vision change in the forty years that separate this short story and nożyk profesora? Also, how does Różewicz cope and reconcile this threat of overused, turned cliché, images and tropes? In a poem titled "Landslide" (Lawina), in the volume Exit (2004), which followed the publication of the professor’s knife, the poet revisits the theme of stones which accumulate in contemporary reality. The stones are no longer in the verses of an old folk song, but rather become the verses of poets. Różewicz’s lyrical subject comments:

    we have been struck by a landslide / of rocks stones pebbles // you could say that the poets / have stoned poetry to death // with words // only the stuttering / Demosthenes made good / use of pebbles / turning them / in his mouth / till he bled / he became one of the greatest / orators / in the world.\(^{110}\)

As mentioned earlier, the question of silence, of the unwritten and unsaid, but also of the absence alluded to, yet muted, is essential for Różewicz’s late poetics. However, here, the poet points to the antinomy of silence—speech. While we experience a “landslide” of stones (words), Różewicz upholds the figure of Demosthenes as the ultimate orator who perseveres, but, most importantly, who tries to speak through or despite pain. In certain situations, as with the professor’s knife, where the object is a trace of someone else’s traumatic experience, the emotions that lie behind this trace in the poet’s memory remain in the realm of the unspoken or
not fully articulated. It is his own history and memory (or the quasi-documentary history of his mother as in *Mother Departs*) that Różewicz willingly exposes, yet when he encroaches onto another’s history, he is careful not to reveal too much. Silence covers pain, while words may not only wound, but also expose, perhaps guarded, secrets. As the figure of Demosthenes manifests, silence does not always denote strength. After all, the poet obsessively returns to the topic of Holocaust memory. Each return is different, however, as he questions, re-reads, uncovers, and tracks traces which surround his themes and tropes.

4 Romanticized youth versus the death mask of a photograph – Rose, Satyr, and silence

4.1 Conversation and an image

Describing the phenomenology of memory, Paul Ricoeur claims that the past appears as an image, while reminiscing and the attempt to remember is conversational. In his effort to remember, Różewicz’s lyrical subject attempts to reconstruct the conversations of the past, yet looks into the cultural iconographic archive for images that would aid his recall. Knowing however, that the poet is wary of words, one needs to ask, what is the balance between the words / text and the images in the conception behind Różewicz’s volume? It is important to note that the cover of Różewicz’s poetic volume has been conceptualized according to the author’s own design, so it is valid to discuss its iconography as an integral part of the text. I argue that Różewicz’s authorial strategy in representation of collective and individual memory is one of collage-like association between the text and the iconography of the image, which functions to highlight the paradoxes arising from these associations. Moreover, in the era of the hyperreal, with its destruction of the image by an overload of signifiers, and of the destruction of the gaze and the spectacle (as declared by Baudrillard), Różewicz attempts to expose the cliché of the image in contemporary culture and bring back the gaze by means of allusions to late 19th century visual cultures of gaze and spectatorship. By doing so, the poet brings to this reader’s attention the naïve sediments of palimpsests that constitute the nature of individual and cultural memory.
Thus, it is by means of both the textual and iconographic spheres of Różewicz’s volume that the reader relates the lyrical subject’s conversation with a young woman on a train to Treblinka (articulated in the poetic narrative text) with the photograph of a female concentration camp prisoner on pages 2-3 of the volume. Różewicz’s lyrical subject attempts to reconstruct his conversation with the young woman as follows:

is this Treblinka already / I am asked by a young / Girl / in the flower of youth / I recognize / her lips / and her eyes like a posy of violets / it’s Róža from Radomsko... „I named her Róža / since a name was needed / and so she is named” / what she was really called / I don’t remember [...] surely it’s Alina I think to myself // Alina the sculptress / student of Xawery Dunikowski / in a cattle car [...] “I’ve got something in my eye” / [...] I have a clean handkerchief I say / […] please don’t be afraid / I say / it’s only a speck of dust //[...] I’m Satyr / […] my unit is stationed at a place called / “high trees””

Here, Różewicz refers to a number of traces: his biography, his own textual archive, and the archives of cultural history. These are both iconographic and textual references. The young woman, perhaps an unknown Jewish girl from his hometown tentatively named “Rose from Radomsko,” gains an identity, and in Różewicz’s memory becomes the sculptress Alina, the student of Xawery Dunikowski. In a poem from 1954 titled „Równina” (“Plains”), Rose was the name of a Jewish girl; yet here, she does not have an individual biography. Her fate and the fate of her people is signalled through a description of the landscape (houses marked with the star of David, abandoned synagogues): „Down Żabia Street /through a Polish city / walks Rose / on uneven cobblestones / past houses with blue stars / and boarded-up windows / walks through a temple / where stray cats / have found their lair”. Since in cultural memory, Holocaust victims exist as a collective victim, in nożyk profesora, Różewicz introduces his individual biography (such easily recognizable facts as, for example, his pseudonym from the time when he served in the Home Army – Satyr), and memory of a concrete individual (the sculptress) as complementary to collective memory. On the other hand, the lyrical subject cannot recall her last name, and as the iconographic references suggest, she could represent both a particular individual and anyone.

One critic, Alexandra Ubertowska, in her book Świadectwo – Trauma – Głos. Literackie Reprezentacje Holokaustu (2007), utilizes Ryszard Nycz’s category of “sylleptic I”, which denotes simultaneously a textual and empirical, a fictional and authentic subjectivity, and thus reads the name of the woman on the train, Rose (Róža), as an incomplete anagram or cryptogram.
of Różewicz’s last name; the lyrical scene on the train, then, within the rubric of “syleneptic I,” would be a traumatic meeting with an intertextual alter ego and simultaneously a confrontation with an unfulfilled version of one’s fate. Moreover, she proposes that in nożyk profesora, Różewicz stubbornly adapts masking strategies which testify to a permanent internalization of fear as to the disclosure of his Jewish identity. Tadeusz Drewnowski, in his monograph of Różewicz titled Walka o oddech. Bio-poetyka: o pisarstwie Tadeusza Różewicza (1990), wrote about the Jewish heritage of Różewicz’s mother. Some critics, particularly in reviews of Mother Departs (1999), drew attention to the fact that in a volume dedicated to his mother, the poet omits the information that she came from a Jewish family of the last name Gelbard, supposedly running away from home and subsequently being raised and working in a Catholic parish in the village of Osjakowo. Here, critics aim to trace the secrets which are not revealed in the texts, and paint Różewicz as a writer who perhaps fearfully guards against disclosing his Jewish heritage. I would, rather, propose that since his mother was a practicing Catholic and the poet grew up with a Catholic upbringing, his exposure to his mother’s Jewish roots was probably minimal, and likely did not factor prominently in his life experience. Moreover, stating the fact of Różewicz’s mother’s Jewish heritage when writing a monographic work on the poet may be appropriate, yet promoting a reading of his work which sensationalizes a long undisclosed, feared secret of the writer’s identity is quite another; the latter, depending on the context of this information, could very well be interpreted as simply a method of showcasing one’s text with tabloid-like strategizing.

I would propose reading Różewicz himself, as the poet also re-reads and returns to his own texts; in fact, he has been called by critics, his own most attentive re-reader. Reading Różewicz as he re-reads his own oeuvre is a more productive interpretive exercise since it shows what the poet himself wants to reveal and what he holds important for his readers. We find an intertextual reference to the abovementioned poem in the writer’s early volume entitled Anxiety (1947); there, we once again encounter a prominent topos of the rose. In this context, Różewicz not only shows that he is continuously and consciously re-reading himself, but also that his late poetry is coming full circle as he returns to re-read his earliest verses:

Rose is the name of a flower / or a dead girl // You can place a rose in a warm palm / or in black soil // A red rose screams / one with golden hair passed in silence // Blood drains from the pale petal / the girl’s dress hangs formless // Five years have passed since Your
death / flower of love that knows no thorns // Today a rose bloomed in the garden / memory of the living and faith have died.118

Krzysztof Kłosiński, in a detailed analysis of this elegiac poem, claims that the lyrical „I” situates itself exclusively in the relation of “you and I” in a rhetorical address to the deceased person,119 whereas a normal conversation can be characterized by a dialogic exchange between the interlocutors. Here, however, Kłosiński notes a rhetorical figure of prosopopeia, in which the absent or imaginary (here: deceased) person has the ability of speech. In Anxiety, the girl remains silent, while in the professor’s knife, she has the ability to speak. In other poems from Anxiety, the “Rose” is a significant connected to the unknown, the unnamed and remains a “name” or “the unnamed” (“Nienazwane mogę nazwać słowem / mogę nazwać ojczyzną / miłością złotem różą”).120 It is a sign that carries with it the dialectic of presence and absence, speech and silence. Różewicz’s lyrical “I,” in the last verse of the poem, grieves the absence of memory— “pamięć żywych umarła i wiarę.” The rose which is both a “name” and „a flower,” or the unnamed, echoes the meaning of the name of the Yad Vashem memorial. Established as a result of the Memorial Law passed by the Knesset in 1953, the origin of the name “Yad Vashem” comes from a Biblical verse (Isaiah, 56:5), which reads: “And to them will I give in my house and within my walls a memorial and a name (Yad Vashem) that shall not be cut off.” In Różewicz’s early poetry, the Rose, both a flower and a name, was a commemorative trope for lives cut short before their time, yet it remained a symbol unattached to any particular biography.121

In the professor’s knife, although the lyrical subject reaches to both private and cultural memory archives as he thinks of the Rose, the name gains a particular individual biography. The meeting of Satyr with the girl named Rose, or, later on, Alina, has unusual, even paradoxical iconographic references to romanticized contexts. The scene of Różewicz’s poetic narration, where the man with his handkerchief removes a piece of coal from the woman’s eye, alludes to a 1946 David Lean, internationally well-known film classic called Brief Encounter, where a similar scene, taking part in a railway station, starts Lean’s tale of forbidden love. In Różewicz’s text there is no mention of a romantic love affair between the man and the girl, yet undoubtedly the youthfulness of both is highlighted and romanticized. She is “in the flower of youth”, and the speaker recalls her lips and eyes like violets, while he is a young soldier of the underground Home Army with the pseudonym, Satyr. In Greek mythology satyrs were young half- humans who roamed the forests and mountains as companions of Pan and Dionysius. These mythological
creatures are often pursuing nymphs and are associated with male sexuality. On the one hand, a romanticized, brief meeting between two young people on a train would be a more normal fabula, yet here the context of extermination camps comes into the conversation between Satyr and the girl, thus defamiliarizing this potentially banal scene.

Moreover, Satyr, evoking the male sexual drive, points to yet another unusual (iconographic) reference in the context of remembering a young woman who was a concentration camp victim. The photograph chosen for Różewicz’s volume (placed on the inside cover) depicts a deceased victim of a concentration camp—a woman lying down with her lower body and breasts uncovered. This is an unusual photograph in that it does not possess the documentary feel of a black and white photo; rather, it has sepia colours of a kind more usually found in family albums and, nowadays, in artistic photography. What is more, the positioning of the woman’s body, hands and arms, with the exception of the head, brings to mind eroticized depictions of the female nude in European painting, such as Giorgione’s *The Sleeping Venus* (1510), Cranach’s *Nymph at the Fountain* (1518), Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538), and nineteenth century examples such as Ingres’ *Odalisque and Slave* (1842) and Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). While the Venus or nymph of the Renaissance is frequently portrayed as sleeping, unaware of her observer, in the nineteenth century paintings the female often confronts the spectator with her gaze. Moreover, the modern nude undergoes a conversion from a goddess of love to a worldly woman to whom one makes love. This notion finds its boldest expression in Manet’s *Olympia*, as the element of the exoticism of the Orient of Ingres’ painting disappears, and the female is simply a Parisian prostitute who makes the viewer uneasy by mocking us with her gaze. In each of the paintings, there is a very prominent hint at the presence of a male voyeur-spectator. After all, the nineteenth century epitomized the prominence of the gaze and spectatorship in its iconography. In the context of Polish painting, one should not omit a twentieth century example of art by one of Różewicz’s close friends, Jerzy Nowosielski’s, particularly his *Nude with Glasses* of 1945. In this piece, the titular glasses reinforce the concept of the gaze and looking, while simultaneously shielding one’s eyes from another’s gaze.

Returning to the photograph of the Holocaust victim included in Różewicz’s volume, I propose that this photo echoes these eroticized portrayals of the feminine. Furthermore, although the woman does not meet the viewer with her gaze, since her opened eyes and face are turned upwards, it is her open, dead eyes, her nudity, and at the same time, the aestheticized beauty of this image that are
uncanny and evoke anxiety. This unease is only strengthened when one makes the disconcerting observation that the lyrical subject as the Satyr in the context of these images becomes the default spectator, a counterpart to the nymph or the potential voyeur that faces the naked female body; yet instead of a nymph or a prostitute, here he encounters a Holocaust victim.

Within the history of Holocaust representation, however, this photo brings to mind yet another photograph of a victim which has gained significant attention in scholarship and later on was, in fact, turned into a work of art. Barbie Zelizer, in her essay “Gender and Atrocity: Women in Holocaust Photographs,” published as part of a collection entitled Visual Culture and the Holocaust (2001), examines the representation of women in the photos taken of the liberation of concentration camps during the spring of 1945 and published in U.S. and British daily and weekly presses. She posits that many of the images have been regularly recycled over the decades that followed, over the course of which the photography of the camps’ liberation came to be reduced to a few stock images which has come to constitute the visual memory of what we now call the Holocaust. She describes a noteworthy story of two photos taken at Bergen Belsen. One was an image of two children (brother and sister) who supposedly starved to death in the camp. That photo appeared in the Saturday Evening Post and the British Journal Picture Post. A corresponding image, however, revealing their mother lying on the ground nearby, did not make the press at the time, only doing so after the liberation. Zelizer describes the photo as a frontal shot of a naked women’s body, covered only partially by a thorn blanket. Her eyes are half open in rigor mortis, her mouth open, hand clasped on her breast. Her brown hair falls on one shoulder, and she is nude from the waist down. She adds that the photo was arresting due to both its graphic nudity and the beauty of the woman portrayed.

Why was the photo of the children widely reproduced, yet the accompanying one of their mother not, Zelizer asks? She contends that the mother of the dead children was perhaps too beautiful, and thus maybe too erotic to be shown. Moreover, her depiction (her naked beauty) undermined the story of barbarity with its capacity to only depict her as a victim of violence; her depiction, thus, did not match the evolving story of Nazi atrocity. The photograph which Różewicz chose for the opening pages of his volume bears striking similarities to the photo described by Zelizer. The open eyes of the victim, the positioning of the arm, her shoulders partially wrapped by a
blanket or an item of clothing, exposed breasts and lower body, and finally the beauty of the victim and the photograph, capable of bringing eroticism to mind—all are deliberately chosen by the poet. I propose that Różewicz, who throughout his whole life has been a connoisseur of visual art and follows contemporary art and news, no doubt has seen the same photograph of the Bergen Belsen victim turned into the realm of overtly erotic art when the avant-garde American photographer, Robert Morris, affixed neon lights and splashes of red paint across the image of this woman’s body and turned her into a “contemporary Sleeping Beauty.” Jacek Leociak links this image to the motif of Eros and Thanatos of German Renaissance art popularized by Hans Baldung (1485-1545), and later famously revived by Edward Munch (1863-1944).¹²⁷ These art historical allusions notwithstanding, here, along with Zelizer, the reader will wonder at the appropriateness and ethics of recycling such atrocious image into the realm of erotic art.¹²⁸ The questions arise: how does Różewicz’s choice of the photograph of the female victim figure into this discussion?; how does it impact our reading of his text?

In answer to these questions, I would first note that there is a double unheimlich in Różewicz’s use of this photograph as an illustration for his poetry. In every photograph there is the return of the dead¹²⁹, yet the female prisoner portrayed in the opening pages of Różewicz’s volume at the time of being captured by the camera is already dead. Barthes argues that photography can be understood as a kind of primitive theatre.¹³⁰ He posits that both photography and theatre are linked by a single intermediary—death. He links the original relation of the theatre to the cult of the dead, noting that the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the dead. Maintaining that “[...] to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead”, Barthes giving examples of the whitened bust of the totemic theatre, the actor with a painted face in Chinese theatre, the rice-paste makeup of the Indian Katha-Kali, and the Japanese No mask. No matter how life-like we try to make the photograph, Barthes claims, it remains a “Tableau Vivant”, a motionless and made-up face beneath which one can see the dead. Yet the photograph in Różewicz’s text is theatre without pretense, a death mask turned authentic. As such, the interplay between the images of Różewicz’s verse and the photograph evokes both eroticized iconographic images of the female body from the cultural archive, and traumatic documentary photographs of Holocaust victims. In doing so, Różewicz strives, among other things, at authenticating the conversations which the writer reconstructs in his memory, as well as the memory process itself, which abounds in unexpected, uncomfortable
and even uncanny associations that make the subject uneasy. Authentication of the past is the main function of the photograph, since as Barthes maintains “[e]very photograph is a certificate of presence” and in the photograph “[f]rom a phenomenological viewpoint, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation.” In a culture dominated by images and simulacra, the photograph in fact bears a powerful force. It confronts and authenticates by force, since by definition a photograph is violent “not because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, but because in it nothing can be refused or transformed.” Through the photograph of a Holocaust victim, which bears links to the erotic images within Western art historical iconography, Różewicz points out that the innocence of the nineteenth century of Ingres or Manet is long gone. Of course, the aestheticized erotic female beauty depicted in Ingres or Manet is not innocent at all, as both painters hint at nineteenth century’s colonialism. Being well versed in art, Różewicz, in his choice of a photograph that aesthetically evokes well-known iconography, suggests that the twentieth century has vastly eclipsed the evils of colonialism, and progressed past enslaving the other to annihilating him or her as a subject altogether. Robert Morris’ “Sleeping Beauty” may be just that type of an example. I also wonder if, by playing on the viewer’s gaze Różewicz, is not aiming to evoke in his reader / viewer a deeper reaction.

Giorgio Agamben, in his book Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive (1999), calls on Levinas’ conception of shame as a feeling rooted in our inability to step away / break from ourselves. He claims that if we experience shame in nudity, it is because “we cannot hide what we would like to remove from the field of vision. […] we are consigned to something from which we cannot in any way distance ourselves.” In his consideration of shame, Agamben cites Levinas, a citation which is pertinent in this discussion as well:

What appears in shame is therefore precisely the fact of being chained to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide oneself from oneself, the intolerable presence of the self to itself. Nudity is shameful when it is the obviousness of our Being, of its final intimacy. And the nudity of our body is not the nudity of a material thing that is antithetical to the spirit but the nudity of our entire Being, in all its plenitude and solidity, in its most brutal expression, of which one cannot not be aware.

In Agamben’s view the inability to separate oneself from something that one cannot stand reveals itself in the feeling of shame. He concludes that shame is produced from an absolute coexistence of subjectification and desubjectification, self-loss and self-possession, servitude
and sovereignty. I posit that this self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty occurs via the gaze in Różewicz’s volume. The reader takes on the shame of nudity and desubjectification of the portrayed victim. When looking at the erotic beauty of the deceased woman in the photograph, one simultaneously wants and does not want to avert one’s gaze; the viewer is trapped in our sovereignty and servitude to the photograph. As Levinas claims, we are “chained to oneself” by our gaze and by our own subjectivity and nudity, just as much as the victim is chained to herself, her nudity, not only in the material sense, but a “nudity of her entire Being” in its final intimacy, which is violated. Thus, the reader is trapped by their own gaze, recognizing their own and the victim’s desubjectification, and the feeling of shame.

Yet, the interplay of the beautiful, the erotic, and the theme of death—the interplay of Eros and Thanatos—is not uncommon in Różewicz. It was already present in Anxiety, where the poet described death via the clichéd symbol of beauty, the rose. However, in the context of the post-war reality of Anxiety, the cliché ceased to be a cliché, and became personalized as the name of a girl who perished. In the professor’s knife, the name Rose is associated with the sculptress Alina. The lyrical subject does not remember her last name, but recalls that she was a pupil of Xawery Dunikowski. Assisting Różewicz’s subject in his search for the identity of this woman, the reader finds that the poet most likely refers to the sculptress Alina Szapocznikow, whose artistic themes make her the student of Dunikowski. In another poem in this volume, the lyrical subject makes this link himself, as he mentions that the professor’s knife was found lying on his desk amongst the volumes on various artistic movements and artists, including Alina Szapocznikow. The trace regarding Szapocznikow is important in reading the professor’s knife. If the reader searches outside of Różewicz’s text, s/he discovers that that sculptress, who went through Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Terezin, survived the war to concentrate in her oeuvre on the memory of the human body. Her depictions of the body strive at capturing the soma that is always under the threat of perishing. From her early works, the artist has made casts of her own body, making it a chief subject of her creativity (turning the body into an art object). Szapocznikow transgressed taboos since, terminally ill, in an almost exhibitionist fashion, she chose to discuss her own approaching death. Her body of work has been defined by the constant memory of war traumas as well as the individual and universal trauma of passing away—themes that characterize Różewicz’s oeuvre and are a particular focus of this poetic volume. Inscribing his biography into the biography of victims and other artists, who remained obsessively haunted by the memory of
war traumas and the Holocaust, Różewicz shows not only that this loyalty is deeply traumatic and obsessive, but also that it functions as an act of authorial self-analysis and re-reading.

### 4.2 The Rose, poetic praxis and /or silence

Returning to the cliché of the rose, Różewicz exposes some of this self-analysis in a poem from the professor’s knife volume entitled “Dawn Day and Night with a Red Rose.” The lyrical subject describes the writing process while he deals with the difficult, even painful presence of a rose:

```plaintext
you gave me a rose / red / almost black inside / autumnal // it stands out sharply / in the empty white / room / as if carved / with a lancet / by Doctor / Gottfried Benn // at night the rose // (...) rouses me / with its thorns // I’d realized that poetry / is jealous of the rose / the rose jealous of poetry // I took from the rose / its reflection in the mirror / and turned it into words…
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Andrzej Niewiadomski, in his article on Różewicz’s meta-poetic discourse observed that the trope of the rose accompanies the process he calls the “inflation of the poetic word”, which dissolves in the “sea of banality.” He notes that the rose appears in these poems as a companion of poetic praxis, where the “state of the rose corresponds to the character of the poem.” However the most important finding, in my view, is that the rose appears as a sign of “particularly dear values contrasted to the reality of trauma and experience of letdown or disappointment”, where the trope is “always associated with the imperative to articulate significant content” (…) a specific speech—poetry, which finds its opposition in golden silence.” In “Dawn Day and Night with a Red Rose”, Różewicz writing about poetic praxis vigilantly yet indirectly returns to Holocaust trauma. The rose is menacing, it constantly marks its presence as it wakes the lyrical subject at night with her thorns. It appears in a white room, bringing to mind a hospital or a laboratory, “as if carved / with a lancet / by Doctor / Gottfried Benn.” Although Gottfried Benn (1886-1956), the German expressionist poet, novelist and medical doctor renounced his support for the Nazis following the “Night of the Long Knives” of 1934, if he had not changed his views, he might have been among the medical professionals who conducted medical experiments on prisoners in concentration camps. Thus, in Różewicz’s text, the rose cut out with a lancet (a small surgical knife, with a short, pointed, double-edged blade
used for making punctures and small incisions) is again a reference to the individual biography of the Rose, later named Alina Szapocznikow. Satyr also performs “an operation” on Alina (“I’ve performed such operations / many times”)¹⁴⁰, he confesses, yet his is an operation of removal of a piece of coal from the girl’s eye. Różewicz however, hints at Alina or Rose’s later fate, once the train will transport her to her destination point of Treblinka: “you’re my guinea pig miss / (she doesn’t know that she’ll remain / a guinea pig).”¹⁴¹ Here, the poet draws the reader’s attention to a variety of types of small knives of that time period (one a lancet, the other his friend’s little knife of a Holocaust survivor). Through these accumulating motifs and interpretive possibilities, Różewicz posits that both his memory and creative process are always inevitably interconnected to trauma, where articulation and speech competes with the inexpressible, and silenced as manifestations of both possibilities: the inability but also the reluctance or unwillingness of articulation.

I strongly agree with Nycz when he characterizes the period of Różewicz’s late oeuvre as one of “experiencing the disintegration-decay of matter, obliteration of ‘true reality’, annihilation or dissemination of meaning (...) a traumatic experience [expressed] as a form of ‘traumatic’ creative relationship to certain external events (regardless, whether historical or intimate, personal).”¹⁴² In *the professor’s knife*, the poet attempts both to verbalize, represent the stories behind his memory traces, and to silence and shield aspects that are perhaps too intimate or emotionally sensitive to be exposed. When dealing with the presence of the rose (the trope that epitomizes this “traumatic” experiencing of reality), the lyrical subject attempts to cope first by removing this wounding element (“I took the rose / into the other room”)¹⁴³, and later confessing: “I took from the rose / its reflection in the mirror / and turned it into words....”¹⁴⁴ Rather than repeating the already banal thesis that words do not correspond to reality, Różewicz’s lyrical subject claims to capture in words the reflection of reality, rather than the real itself. The reflection, as opposed to the “real”, and silence are Różewicz’s means of coping with the returning traumatic memory which he relentlessly decodes in his individual existential and creative textual experience. The lyrical subject of *Recycling* in the poem entitled “Mirror” („Zwierciadło”) admits: „after years of noise / unnecessary questions / and answers / silence enfolds me // silence is my poems / mirror / their reflections say nothing // Rembrandt swaddled in old age / toothless / chews me / chuckling / exhibited / in the Wallraf Museum // why didn’t you become / a mute painter / a Nikifor Krynicki // lines ravaged by time / delineate our common
face.” It is the poet, with the praxis of his poetry, and the individual poetic text who looks at his own reflection, inevitably looking at the reflection of his own biography, individual and textual memory through countless cultural transparencies.

4.3 The Text as an Object

*The professor’s knife* is an example of an insistent return to the subject of the Holocaust and the re-reading of its memory traces in Różewicz’s late *oeuvre*. It is also, however, as much about the knife (the trace of Porębski’s experience), as about Różewicz’s authorial experience and the history of the twentieth century. I have mentioned before that in this volume, the text of Różewicz’s poem itself also functions as an object, an object with its own biography. With the passing of years and decades, the remembrance of the Holocaust has overgrown with banal, used-up images, so the poet looks into its earlier textual representations and its superimpositions over the palimpsest of cultural memory, only to confirm that it unceasingly functions in the in-between – between silence and speech, text and image, the individual and collective. His own text responds to each of these in-between points of contact (text and image, individual and collective, speech and silence) and shows that the subjective, deeply personal mnemonic experience cannot be clearly cut out from the traces of cultural memory. With this volume Różewicz tests himself, his own memory (with its fetishes, copies/ repetitions, and holes) as much as the representation of the Holocaust. Thus, the text as an object has a different meaning in my study in contrast to the meaning that Shallcross ascribed to the text as an object in her book *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (2011). Shallcross focuses on the texts of the Holocaust and declares that she is at pains to describe the ontology and the status of the Holocaust text as both a material thing and a written document. She applies the term *precarium* (which in its original legal context describes the deposit of items slated to be returned to their owners upon a positive change of situation) to the Holocaust texts (texts as fragile material objects) claiming that it sets apart Holocaust-era text from postwar writings, a necessary move because their incriminating message endangered them, as well as their authors and keepers. In the case of Różewicz and my study, the text in question is not a Holocaust text, but a text about the Holocaust, and thus my understanding of the text as an object vastly differs from Shallcross’. Różewicz’s text is an object existing in postmemory, an object of prosthesis. It is not
an endangered text and it does not endanger its author, yet it still preserves and archives
individual memory and traces which are endangered.

Moreover, some traces of the texts may be “endangered” in the sense of being compromised due
to their existence in different cultural contexts. Thus, the text itself is an object that functions
differently depending on cultural context. Here I aim to show an example of such difference
(particularly with respect to its presence in the Polish context versus its North American
existence, reading, and reception) where some traces of the text may be jeopardized. Let’s focus
first, however, on the text as an object in the Polish context (thus read by readers and critics in
the original).

The text of the volume becomes an object since the iconography included on its cover and inside
the volume itself suggests what is inside, co-creates the meaning of the content, and suggests a
certain reading of authorial intention. Here I need to mention another publication on the
Holocaust, no doubt a text-object, which in my opinion Różewicz’s texts elicit. I have in mind
here the 1946 publication of a collection of short stories and essays entitled „Byliśmy w
Oświęcimiu” (We were in Auschwitz) by three authors: Janusz Nel Siedlecki, Tadeusz Borowski
and Krystyn Olszewski.147 All three were prisoners of Auschwitz and Dachau. What was highly
significant about this publication was the strategy of the authorial project to stress the
authenticity of their experience. Thus, in the opening of the book, the names of the authors are
preceded by their concentration camp prisoner numbers. Yet, there was also one more
remarkable aspect of this publication: a limited number of copies had a cover made from the
material of prisoners’ uniforms. (The American edition, in Alicja Nitecki’s translation alludes to
this strategy of recycling only via imitation). The goal of this authorial strategy was to create an
authentic document of their life and experience in Auschwitz. Różewicz, in my view, by
selecting Porębski’s knife (or to be precise, its photograph) on the volume’s front cover is also
highlighting a documentary approach, yet the back folio of the volume stresses postmemory, the
remembrance and memorialization of the Holocaust via the photograph of the Yad Vashem
monument. The photo of the female prisoner on the inside of the cover functions as that in-
between, difficult space where the document can hinder or even betray its documentary attempt.
In one of his poems entitled “wyprzedaż w firme TADZIO” (sale in a company called TADZIO) from Kup kota w worku (2008) (Pig in a Poke), Różewicz writes: „I have a lot of poems in the drawer / (...) I have poems cut / from a piece of oak wood / from a branch of cherry tree in bloom / tied to a bird song.” The poem becomes an object since it should take on the form of the described „object”, event, and history. As the poet himself says: “You know, this poem wants to become similar to the form of the knife… It has to, this poem, turned into an object.”

Zbigniew Solski claims that Różewicz has taken this technique of writing and reading from Norwid. In Norwid, „the sculptor – poet [...] positions the poem in front of our eyes like a sculpture [...]. Moves away from his poem and together with us looks and examines.” That may be true, and thus I argue that it is very important for the reader to note the architecture of the text, including all its different versions and drafts with author’s notes that are included in the published volume. In my view Różewicz is more like an architect who pays particular attention to the drafts and plans of his structures / texts. The practise of publishing additional versions of the texts (usually in print with handwritten corrections, crossed out verses / sections and additions) is not new or unique to this volume. In 1976, in Poezje zebrane, the poet included photocopies of a few versions of an unpublished poem “Odcięty.” Similar “manuscripts” of texts can be found in the volumes Opowiadanie traumatyczne. Duszyczka (1979) and zawsze fragment i zawsze fragment. recycling (1998). In Plaskorzęba (1991), we find the handwritten and typed versions of all the poems in the volume. As well, in 1993, he published a special edition volume titled Historia pięciu wierszy in which he included studies of consecutive versions of the poems “Zwierciadło”, “Przypomnienie”, “Woda w garnuszu”, “Niagara i autoironia”, “Patyczek” and “Dezerterzy.” In nożyk profesora, the draft of the poem is published at the end of the volume, after the table of contents, information about the editor, publisher and copyright. It is also published on a different type of paper (the paper itself is meant to denote a working version or draft, as it is off-white, in contrast to the white colour of paper reserved for the texts of the volume proper). Thus, the draft seemingly belongs and does not belong to the volume. Furthermore, when comparing the different versions of the poem, it is not easy to decipher which version the reader should consider to be the final one. Many of the changes that have been made in the “manuscript” do not appear in the final version.
The manuscript also contains many noteworthy authorial commentaries, which, as Drzewucki claims, sometimes help and sometimes hinder the reader’s interpretation of the poem.\textsuperscript{151} The reader will find additions and comments, for instance about a popular war song sang by Marlene Dietrich called “Lili Marlen”, about the Internet, about the broken heart of the Sigismund bell of the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków, about Ernest Jünger, Celine, Pound, Benn, Heidegger, Hitler, the painter, and Stalin, the linguist and poet, about art critic Ryszard Stanisławski, about Xavery Dunikowski (Alina Szapocznikow’s teacher), who was a prisoner of Auschwitz, and about Różewicz’s friend, writer Kornel Filipowicz, who was a prisoner at Gross-Rosen and Oranienburg.\textsuperscript{152} I want to draw attention to a stanza added to the manuscript of the poem (and the conversation between Rose and Satyr), yet later omitted, in the fifth part of the poem entitled “Pociągi odchodzą dalej” (“The trains keep leaving”). The stanza reads: „Czy to już...pyta Dziewczyna / nie panienko to dopiero / Sobibór Majdanek.../ potem będzie Jedwabne / Jedwabne? jaka to piękna / nazwa.”\textsuperscript{153} This is how Różewicz illustrates and alludes to the national debate about the Jedwabne massacre of July 10, 1941 in Nazi-occupied Poland (carried out against the Jewish population of the town by Poles).\textsuperscript{154} Drzewucki posits that “these few lines mean more (...) than the general national debate about the responsibility for the murder committed by the Poles on Polish Jews in Jedwabne (...) these few lines, compromise and discredit this, to a great extent, embarrassing debate.”\textsuperscript{155} With these lines Różewicz expresses bitter irony about the cycle of violence in history and the interchangeable roles of victims and perpetrators. I agree with Drewnowski here that Różewicz discredits the furious national debate on Jedwabne, just as much as I agree with Porębski when he, in conversation with Różewicz, said to the poet: “When you publish consecutive versions [of texts] in drafts, it is a history of the poem.”\textsuperscript{156} As such, this history and biography of the poem-object is vital to the reading of the volume as a whole; it is an integral part of the volume. This is how Różewicz expands the trace of the knife onto his reading of the history of the twentieth century, tracing the individual, singular trace and history onto the collective, international archive of memory.

The text as an object lives differently, however, in the North American context. It functions differently as an archive and as prosthesis precisely because of what is missing in the text. When Shallcross discusses the presence of the Holocaust objects- texts in contemporary archives, she highlights the exclusion of touch. We access these texts through mediation (through microfilms, photographs, computerized images), and thus, she contends, this severance doubles the distance
between the researchers and the witnesses. She claims that one can never reconstruct “tangible realness” but merely a construct of the past based on the language of traces. Różewicz, in nożyk profesora, in my view focuses on a similar mediation of experience and history through traces (text, objects, photographs, monuments) but also on the mediation of reading and interpretation via the history of the text-object. His text is known to North American audiences primarily through two translations: one by Bill Johnston (as part of the volume entitled new poems which also includes poems from the poet’s volumes “Szara Strefa” (“Gray Zone”) (2002), “Wyjście” (“Exit”) (2004), and “recent poems” (2007), and the second by Joanna Trzeciak in a volume Sobbing Superpower: Selected Poems of Tadeusz Różewicz (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011). Neither one of the translations include the drafts / manuscript versions of the poem published in the Polish edition. Thus, such vital stanzas as the aforementioned one on Jedwabne are missing in the English context. The history of the text-object is missing, vital contexts are not included and this inevitably has significant bearings on the ethics of reading and reception. Drzewucki writes that nożyk profesora should be counted among the greatest of Różewicz’s poetic accomplishments, adding that “our twentieth century, our world, we ourselves are reflected in these texts” (“W tych tekstach przegląda się nasz wiek XX; nasz świat, my sami.”) If critical parts of it are missing, this reflection itself is incomplete and the full scope of Różewicz’s archive is not available to the English language reader. I think it is vital to note that in the professor’s knife, Różewicz includes the draft only for the titular cycle, even though two other poems which are included in this volume, “brama” (“gateway”) and “deszcz w Krakowie” (“rain in Kraków”), have been previously published, with drafts, in the periodical Twórczość (2000, nr. 10). The poet, by forgoing the drafts here, directs the reader’s focus to the versions of the titular cycle only. The interplay of additions and retractions of meanings and contexts, the difficulty with establishing which version of the poem should be considered the final one, I would argue, is the key to the reading of this volume. Różewicz carefully builds an archive of the text in this volume and not taking this into consideration in translation presents a vastly different text, a different text-object, a different reading, and a greatly diminished archive.

Tadeusz Sobolewski, in an article commemorating Różewicz’s 90th birthday asks: “What can be saved from the civilizational flood, of which Różewicz became a prophet?” In that text he
recalls Różewicz’s 2005 poem “Cóż z tego że we śnie” (“so what if it’s a dream”) with its vision of a tsunami which turns into a big media attraction:

Tsunami is a colourful media / spectacle on the surface / of infinity / Prying cameras rummage among the cadavers / lenses penetrating defenseless dead bodies / reporters and photographers / carry in their claws / fragments shreds pieces / of human flesh watches / heads arms rings hands / earrings innards notebooks cell phones / ‘everything’ gradually / returns to normal / Tourists do not give up / the vacations they have paid for / it’s good viewing it sets the adrenaline pumping / there are record ratings.160

The camera eye, and thus the gaze and spectatorship, or gawking, once again become the subject of violation and criticism. Similarly, the media is shown as multiplying an informational garbage heap in the poema “recycling” from zawsze fragment. In recycling (1998), fashion catalogues are compared to the clothes of female concentration camp prisoners, and one particular phrase is repeated, with slight adjustments, at length: “a może / Holocaust nie było” (or perhaps / the Holocaust never happened) “ale Holocaustu może nie było” (but perhaps Holocaust did not happen) “ale Holocaustu przecież nie było” (but the Holocaust never happened)161 In nożyk profesora, Różewicz does not only want to attest to the individual experiences of the Holocaust, confirming that it did happen, but more importantly to confirm that it does not belong to the past. That is why the poet repeats Norwid’s words: “Przeszłość to dziś tylko cokowiek dalej” (The past – is now, though somewhat far).162 In a world of multimedia chaos, reality becomes degraded; simulacra of mass culture and the proliferation of media images, texts and contexts threaten reality. As our reading of the photo of the dead concentration camp prisoner inside the volume’s cover attests to, art itself fails to do justice to reality—it aestheticizes, it distorts, fabricates. Różewicz travelled to Israel and visited Yad Vashem in 1999. During a poetry reading in Jerusalem, he mentioned that it was precisely the visit at Yad Vashem museum which made the most impact on him during that trip.163 Two years later, nożyk profesora is published, so although in the poema the lyrical subject tells the reader he has been thinking about writing about Porębski’s knife for over half a century, I suggest it was the trip to Yad Vashem which might have been the final catalyst that prompted the publication of this volume. After all, the iconography of the cover of the volume can be read in this vein (the mnemonic journey begins with the knife on the front cover and ends with the train wagon memorial to the victims of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem on the back folio). In his text, Różewicz takes us through decades of time—from the experience of the Holocaust, to decades of life following it, and finally to its
memorialization within an archive (of a text, within one’s memory or within a museum). Similarly to Derrida, Różewicz highlights the constructive / productive power of the archive, and, like the philosopher, he contends that the archive is not a question of the past, but rather of the future. What will remain from the memory of this event in the future is a key issue for the sake of which he takes on an ethical responsibility. His poetic credo is one of struggle in order to salvage something, to preserve it in an “ark / archive that is his oeuvre: “I write on water / I write on sand / from a handful of salvaged words / from a few simple phrases / like the prose of carpenters / from a few naked poems / I build an ark / to save something / from the flood… So what if it’s a dream”164

NOTES

1 I am preserving the integrity of lack of capitalization of Różewicz’s title, as do most of his translators.


5 Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” Yale Journal of Criticism 6, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 249.

6 Andreas Huyssen in his book Presents Pasts. Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory (2003) outlines his aim of reading palimpsests as follows: “My focus on reading palimpsests is not some imperialism of écriture… It is rather the conviction that literary techniques of reading historically, intertextually, constructively, and deconstructively at the same time can be woven into our understanding of urban spaces as lived spaces that shape collective imaginaries” (2003, 7). I follow Huyssen’s inspiration in this regard and claim that palimpsests are susceptible to naiveté when some of those reading techniques are not fully utilized.


8 Ibid., 8.

9 See Huyssen, 249-261.

10 Geoffrey Hartman, “Public Memory and Modern Experience,” Yale Journal of Criticism 6, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 239.

12 Carrier, “Places and Politics,” 47.

13 Lawrence D. Kritzman, “In Remembrance of Things French,” Forward to *Rethinking the French Past: Realms of Memory*, vol. 1: x-xi. Please note that Halbwach’s conception of collective memory, as fully dependent on “the frameworks of social memory”, namely family, religion, and social class, is an outdated concept in memory theory. For example, Landsberg argues of Halbwach’s culturally specific concept of collective memory that it is “tied to a culturally and historically specific group of people,” and thus no longer adequate, as technologies of mass culture have created shared social frameworks for people who inhabit different socio-cultural spaces. Landsberg proposes that modernity brings about a new form of public cultural memory, which she calls *prosthetic memory*, emerging at the “interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past.” Landsberg, 2, 8.

14 Ibid., x.


20 Ibid., 23.


22 Ibid., 236.


25 Ibid., 29.

26 Milton, quoted in Hirsch, 217.


One should note however, a key distinction, for in Baudrillard the gadget is defined by its ludic function which the knife in Róźewicz’s text does not possess.
45 Różewicz, nożyc profesora, 19; Johnston, 18. “pewnie otwiera nim koperty / a w obozie / obierał kartofle / albo się golil.”

46 Różewicz, nożyc profesora, 17-21; Johnston 18-20. „był rok 1968...1969 / człowiek postawił stopę na księżyce / (...) u nas był ‘marzec’ pamiętny / marzec ‘pisarze do pióra!’ / ktoś mi złamał pióro... na lotnisku czytałem napisy / pisarze do pióra syjonisci do domu [...]”


50 Stola, 1.

51 Ibid., 1.

52 Eisler, 169.

53 Ibid., 167.

54 Różewicz, nożyc profesora, Johnston, 20. „Aleksander Malachowski / prosił mnie o rozmowę dla TV/ mówiłem o tym, że ten krok / ślady ludziej stopy na księżyce / odmieni świat i ludzi... Naïwny.”; “któś mi złamał pióro.”


57 Ibid., 300.


59 Shallcross, Rzeczy i Zagłada, 106.

60 Ibid., 52.

61 Ibid., 52.


63 Shallcross, Rzeczy i Zagłada, 56.

„Non omnis moriar – moje dunne włości, / Łąki moich obrusów, twierdze szaf niezłomnych, /Prześcieradła rozległe, drogocenna poścień / i suknie, jasne suknie pozostaną po mnie. (...) // Niech więc rzeczy żydowskie twoja dłoń wyszpera, / Chominowo, lwowianko, dzielna żono szpiciła, / Donosicielka chyża, matko folksdojczera. // (...) Kilimy i makaty, półmiski, lichtarze – Niechaj pięć noc całą, a o świecie brzasku / Niech zaczną szukać cennych kamieni i złota / W kanapach, materacach, kolarach i dywanach.”

65 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 17-21; Johnston 18-20.

66 Shallcross, Rzeczy i Zagłada, 56.

67 Johnston 8; Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 10. „po latach siedzimy z Mieczysławem / przy śniadaniu / kończymy wiek XX // kroje chleb na desce / smaruję masłem / jeszcze szczypa soli....”


69 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 6; Johnston 4. „Robigus / (...) co w starożytności / trawił metale / - choć nie imal się złota - / [who] pożera klucze / i zamki / miecze lemiesze noże / ostrza gilotyn topory / szyny ....”

70 Baurdillac, Revenge of the Crystal, 51.

71 Ibid., 51.


73 Ibid., 255.

74 Johnston 3-7; Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 9. „pociągi towarowe / wagony bydlęce / koloru wątroby i krwi / długie ‘sklepy’ / naladowane banalnym Złem / [...] kończymy swój przelot / w piecu ognistym / [...] pociąg kończy / swój bieg / zamienia / się w pomnik.”

75 Huyssen, Twilight Memories, 258.

76 Różewicz, here, makes an intertextual reference to Hannah Arendt and her book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1963). Arendt discredits the idea that Nazi criminals were psychopathic and that common people were incapable of unimaginable cruelty against another human being when it came to the question of obeying orders.

77 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 9; Johnson 3-7. „kończymy swój przelot / w piecu ognistym”

78 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 9; Johnson 3-7. „pociąg kończy / swój bieg / zamienia / się w pomnik”

79 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 7-9; Johnston 3-7. “z Węgier pod koniec wojny / odjechał złoty pociąg”; “kamienny pociąg / (...) nad odcienią”; “Inter Regnum – pociągu do Berlina”

80 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 8; Johnston 5-6. „[...] stoję w ostatnim wagonie / Inter Regnum – pociągu / do Berlina / [...] wyjmuję zakładkę z książki / wiersza Norwida / przeczytam / most / który łączy przeszłość / z przyszłością / Przyszłość jest to dziś, / tylko cokolwiek dalej... [...]”

81 Nie Bóg stworzył p r e s z l o ś c, i śmierć, i cierpienia, / Lecz ów, co prawa rwie; / Więc – nieznośne mu dnie; / Więc, czując zle, chciał odepchnąć s p o m n i a ! Czerniawski, 58; Norwid, 128.

82 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 7; Johnston, 5.
83 Różyewicz, nożyk profesora, 7; Johnston, 5. „amerykańscy oficerowie / w To zamieszani / nic nie wiedzą / nic nie słyszeli / zresztą wymirają.”

84 Różyewicz, nożyk profesora, 7; Johnston 5. „[...] z Węgier pod koniec wojny / odjechał złoty pociąg [...] // złote pociągi bursztynowe komnaty / satopionie kontynenty / arka Noego / może moi węgierscy przyjaciele / słyszeli coś o tym pociągu / może zachował się Kurkbuch / ostatni rozkład jazdy / z oblężonego Budapesztu”


88 Różyewicz, nożyk profesora, 9; Johnston 7-8. „kamienny pociąg / stoi / nad oddalanią / jeśli go ożywiły / krzyki / nienawiść / rasistów nazistów / fundamentalistów / runie jak lawina / na ludzkość / nie na ‘ludzkość’! // na człowieka”


90 Ibid., 103. „poeta ten typ organizacji osiąga najczęściej dzięki parataktycznej strukturze całości...”


92 Ibid., 103-4.


94 Nycz, 103.

95 Jan Stolarczyk, ed. Wbrew sobie: Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Różyewiczem. “Jak powstał ‘nożyk profesora’?” (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2011), 361. My translation from Polish. „To jak byłem w tym...Gross Rosen, a później byłem w takim baucugu... to była taka Aussenkommando, która naprawiała tory. Jak alianci zbombardowali tory, to nasz pociąg tam jechał, no i wyprowadzaliśmy tę linię.”

96 Ibid., 366. „więc element pociągu... o tym, co ty mówisz, że pracowałeś przy torach, to ja nie wiedziałem. I ten element pociągu sam mi się zjawił w związku z tym, że was wieżeli. W związku z transportami.” My translation from Polish.

“jak ciężko jest być / pasterzem umarłych // co rusz / żywi proszą / aby napisać ‘coś’ / drobiazg’ / o kimś kto umarł / odszedł zasnął // a ja jestem ten co pisze życie / żyje i znów pisze // niech umarli grzebią swoich umarłych // [...] ja poeta – pasterz życia / zostałem pasterzem umarłych.”


99 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 32-33; Johnston, 31-33.


101 Ibid., 98.


103 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 32.


The famous motif from Julian Przyboś’s poetry – the gothic cathedral – has been replaced in Różewicz’s imagination by a Cracovian church: “Ten budynek, na który patrzę, nie jest kościołem, nie jest zabytkiem architektury, nie jest dziełem sztuki, jest spustoszoną, rozwaloną budzą, jest kupą gruzu… [...] żeby cegla po cegle, wznosić w sobie ten kościół. żeby element po elemencie zrekonstruować człowieka”

See Robert Cieślak on the discussion of Różewicz’s choice of enrolling in the history of art as his major of study after the war in connection to the metaphor of resurrecting the cathedral.


107 Ibid., 86-87.

„– Gdzie są te włosy, mówili, że tu są włosy, a ja tu żadnych włosów nie widzę. Ignasiu, czy nie wiesz, gdzie są te protezy i włosy? – A na co ci protezy i włosy? Jak ja tu byłem przed dziesięciu laty, to wszystko było. Wszędzie tego było pełno. (...) Mamo, tu nie ma ma, takie muzeum, ja już chcę iść, kiedy pojedziemy?” My translation from Polish.

108 Tadeusz Różewicz, Wycieczka do muzeum, 93.


„W dzień końca świata / Kobiety idą polem pod parasolkami / Pijak zasypia na brzegu trawnika / Nawołują na ulicy sprzedawcy warzywa / (...) Tylko siwy staruszek, który byłby prorokiem, / Ale nie jest prorokiem, bo ma inne zajęcie, / Powiada przewiżającym pomidory: / Innego końca świata nie będzie: / Innego końca świata nie będzie.”


112 Baudrillard, The Intelligence of the Evil or the Lucidity Pact, 92, 31.

113 Różewicz, nożyk profesora, 22-25; Johnston 22-25.

„czy to już Treblinka / pyta mnie młoda / w pełnej wiośnie lat / Dziewczyna / przypominam sobie / jej usta / i oczy / jak garść fiołków / to Róża z Radomska... „zwalem ją Różą / iż trzeba było nazwać / więc jest nazwana” / jak miała na imię / nie pamiętam [...] przecież to Alina myśle // Alina rzeźbiarka / uczeńnica Xawerego Dunikowskiego / w wagonie bydlęcym [...] „cos mi wpadło do oka” / [...] mam czystą chusteczkę / mówię / to tylko pylek / [...] jestem Satyr / [...] miejsce postoju oddzia / Zmiennego”


115 Aleskandra Ubertowska, Świadectwo – Trauma – Głos. Litarackie Reprezentacje Holocaustu (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 138-139.

116 Ibid., 143.


„Róża to kwiat / albo imię umarłej dziewczyny // Różę w ciepłej dłoni można złożyć / albo w czarnej ziemi // Czerwona róża krzyczy / złotowłosa odeszła w milczeniu // Krew ociekła / z bladego płatka / kształt opuścił suknie // Dzisiaj róża rozkwita w ogrodzie / Pamięć żywych umarła i wiara”


120 Ibid., 15.

121 The rose, in the history of poetry, is probably the most banal of flowers due to its popularity as a trope. It is also a symbol of poetic inspiration / a muse. I will return to the function of this banal trope in Różewicz’s poetry a little bit later on in my discussion.

122 Here I have in mind direct depictions of the gaze and spectatorship, as for example in Auguste Renoir’s La Loge (1874), where the male in the background watches other loges through binoculars, and the female is on display (as an object of other gazes) in the foreground; in Gustave Caillebotte’s Young Man at His Window (1875), where the male observer is watching the street and a small female figure from the balcony of his apartment; in La Place de l’Europe, temps de pluie by the same author (1877), where the flâneur is one of the passersby on the street.
Różewicz’s close lifelong friendship with Jerzy Nowosielski and the fact that the poet is very familiar with his art has been documented by critics. Also, one should note, here, yet another instance where the commonality of experience and of the intellectual interests of Różewicz and Porębski intersect. Mieczysław Porębski’s interest in the art of Nowosielski has resulted in a book detailing the painter’s art and life entitled Nowosielski (2003). Please also note the recently published decades of correspondence between the painter (Nowosielski) and Różewicz -- Tadeusz Różewicz, Zofia i Jerzy Nowosielscy. Korespondencja, ed. Krystyna Czerni. (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011).

See also Krystyna Czerni’s recent biography of Jerzy Nowosielski: Nietoperz w Świątyni. Biografia Jerzego Nowosielskiego (Kraków: Znak, 2011).

Regarding fears of eroticization of the body—a concern expressed by the Orthodox Jews when it came to showing the nudity of female victims in Holocaust museum exhibitions— see James Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (Yale University Press, 1993).


Ibid., 257.


Ibid., 9.

Ibid., 87.

Ibid., 89.

Ibid., 91.


Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, 107.


139 Ibid., 91. “Róża towarzyszy procesowi, który daloby się nieprecyzyjnie określić inflacją słowa poetyckiego, rozmowy o biểnaniu w morzu banału (...). Róża pojawia się w tych tekstach także jako nieodłączna towarzysząca praktyk poetyckich, a czasem funkcjonowanie wiersza zależy od ‘działania’ róży, ‘stan’ róży korespondując z charakterem utworu. (...) Inny wariant obecności róży to jej pojawienie się jako znaku wartości szczególnie cennych, skontrastowanych z rzeczywistością traumy i z doświadczeniem klęski. Róża jest tu zawsze połączona z sytuacją chęci artysty, a nie tylko istotnych (...) róży reprezentuje specyficzną formę mówienia – poezję, dla której opolację jest milczenie oznaczane jako złoto...” My translation from Polish.

140 Różewicz, nożek profesora, 24; Johnston 24. “już nie raz przeprowadzałem takie operacje”

141 Różewicz, nożek profesora 24; Johnston 24. „Jest Pani moim królikiem / (nie wie jeszcze że zostanie / królikiem doświadczalnym)"

142 Nycz, 105, 106. „doświadczeniem rozpadu - rozkładu materii, unicestwienia ‘prawdziwej rzeczywistości’, anihilacji czy rozpras zania sensu. (...) doświadczeniem traumatycznym – rodzi się ono bowiem jako forma ‘urazowej’ jak gdyby relacji twórczej na pewne zewnętrzne wydarzenia. (...) (bez względu na to, czy są one wynikiem wydarzeń historii powszechnej czy intymnej, osobistej).” My translation from Polish.

143 Johnston, 29.

144 Johnston, 30.


147 Shallcross mentions this publication as an example of text-object in: Rzeczy i Zagład, 175.

148 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku (work in progress) (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008), 96. “mam dużo wierszy w szufladzie / (...) mamy wiersze wystrugane / z kawalka dębowego drewna / z gałęzi kwitnącej wiśni / sploczone ze spiewem ptaka.” My translation from Polish.

149 Porębski, “Jak powstał ‘nożek profesora’?”, 365. „Ale wiesz, ten wiersz chce się upodobić do formy tego nożyka... On musi się, ten wiersz, w rzecz zamienić.” My translation from Polish.


152 Ibid., 109.

153 „Is it here already ... asks a Girl / no miss it is only / Sobibór Majdanek... / later will be Jedwabne / Jedwabne? / what a beautiful name.” My translation from Polish.

154 A book about the massacre in Jedwabne which gained a great deal of notoriety in both the Polish and North American context is Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka (Sejny, Fundacja Pogranicze, 2000); The Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (Princeton University Press,
2001), authored by the historian Jan Gross. This publication created a vigorous debate in the media and among academic communities.

155 Drzewucki, „Róża…”, 110. “[t]ych kilka linijk znaczy więcej (...) niż ogólnonarodowa debata na temat odpowiedzialności za mord popełniony przez Polaków na polskich Żydach w Jedwabnem (...) tych kilka liniek calą tę, w znacznej mierze zawstydzającą, debatę kompromituje i unieważnia.” My translation from Polish.

156 „Jak powstał nożyk profesora,” 360. “Jak ty publikujesz kolejne wersje w rękopisie, to jest historia wiersza.” My translation from Polish.


158 Drzewucki, „Róża…”: 111.


160 Tadeusz Różewicz, new poems, tans. Bill Johnston, 244-245. “kolorowym widowiskiem (...) na powierzchni/ nieskończoności / Wścibskie kamery grzebią w zwłokach/ obiektywy penetrują bezbronne martwe ciała/ dziennikarze i fotoreporterzy/ unoszą w pazurkach/ fragmenty strzępki kawalki/ ludzkiego mięsa zegarki/ głowy ręce pierścionki dłonie/ kolczyki wnętrznosci notesy komórki/ powoli wszystko / wraca do normy/ Turyści nie rezygnowaliby z wykupionych wczasów/ to się ogląda to podnosi adrenalinę / oglądalność bije rekordy.”


164 Tadeusz Różewicz, new poems, trans. Bill Johnston, 245. „piszę na wodzie / piszę na piasku / z garści ocalonych słów/ z kilku zdań prostych / jak proza cieśli/ z kilku nagich wierszy / buduję arkę / żeby coś uratować z potopu / który nas zaskakuje / w biały dzień / albo w środku nocy / zmywa z powierzchni ziemi / buduję moją arkę / (...) Coż z tego że we śnie?”
Chapter 2

*Memento Mori* in Text and Image; or, Whose Story Is It? — Tadeusz Różewicz’s *Mother Departs* (1999)

“Writing so as not to die ... is a task undoubtedly as old as the world.” – Michel Foucault

1 The archive: text, photograph, and memory

Różewicz’s late style is characterized by a mnemonic preoccupation with respect to individual narratives that focus on the entirety and continuity of an individual’s life experience; a looking back on one’s existence and *oeuvre* from the standpoint of the finitude of old age. In *Mother Departs* (1999), like in *the professor’s knife* (2001)¹, the poet writes about the untold stories, the missing narratives, and absent conversations for which he has longed, yet never had; conversations which he has meant to address in writing for many years but has failed to do so. In *the professor’s knife* Mieczysław Porębski’s full story is never told; similarly, Stefania Różewiczowa’s story in *Mother Departs* remains incomplete or veiled, both to the reader and to the interlocutor, the authorial subject himself. I argue that it is the mnemonic process itself vis-à-vis the dialectic of mortality and immortality which Różewicz thematizes through his focus on the modalities of memory and intertextuality, and memory and representation. In Różewicz’s late works, the poetics of repetition (Skrendo)² is very much structured around a textual rereading, as well as rereading of memory.

I read *Mother Departs* not as some critic do—a document, a monument to the poet’s mother, a narrative of grief—but rather as a poet’s rereading of the quasi-documents of a familial archive. It consists of a re-consideration of textual post-memory, where the author, while constructing a literary monument to his deceased parent, also creates a portrait of his own origins, a narrative of the poetic beginnings which have defined his entire creative *oeuvre*. In this hybrid volume Różewicz is himself a reader of his own and the textual memory of others whose authorial subjectivity, faced with a particular temporality of old age, is brought to the fore as he rereads textual and iconographic representations which house fragments of his mnemonic experience.
In my analysis of this volume, I will first consider the paradoxes of a multi-voiced narrative, belonging to the *silva rerum* form\(^3\) that reinforces a singular authorial voice and his subjective experience as a memory key through which the reader enters his text. The poet includes not only his own old journal entries, but also texts supposedly written by his mother (her reminiscences). Moreover, he adds facsimiles of pages from his agenda dating to 1957, fragments of a letter by Janusz Różewicz dating to 1940, and a letter from his mother, addressed to the poet and dated 1943. Finally, he makes space for a narrative reminiscence about their mother penned by the poet’s younger brother, Stanisław Różewicz. By highlighting multi-voicing Różewicz simultaneously, though implicitly, thematizes the reading process. These texts were each originally created for a different audience, yet here all are adapted for Różewicz’s authorial audience. The poet is the focalizer\(^4\) of these texts, one who simultaneously creates and reads the familial archive, and through this process examines what constitutes and remains from a personal history (experiential, written, and remembered). Różewicz unveils personal secrets by guiding his reader through carefully selected and/or created documents and quasi-documents. On the surface, this volume is dedicated to the life of the mother seen in relationship to that of her sons. I would argue, however, that it is a story of the life of the poet (Różewicz himself) as he reads it through texts, both texts written by others and those written by himself. Despite the presence of multi-voiced narratives in *Mother Departs*, Różewicz focuses on his own authorial “I” and his individual existential situation—that of a writer nearing the end of his literary career—by highlighting the communicative “reading-writing” situation, where he is the chief reader and dominant creator of a personal, turned public, archive.

In this late work, as is characteristic of Różewicz’s late poetics, the poet questions both textual and iconographic representations of experience and its ability to preserve memory. The question remains: can text, document or a photograph of a personal archive be turned into a narrative in the public cultural sphere? In doing so, can it do battle with mnemonic mortality and preserve memory beyond the subject’s physical existence? Simply put, it is my contention that through addressing the end of his literary creativity and mortality, Różewicz is returning to the question about the power of language and literature and their ability to preserve experience for cultural posterity. In the second part of this chapter, I will focus on the intertexts of documents and quasi-documents presented in this volume to show that while they are meant to authenticate the past (where the poet turns to the archive to authenticate), he at the same time questions their ability to
represent experience and preserve memory. Furthermore, I will argue that he signals that it is frequently the creative literary text that can communicate the experience and memory of the past with much greater clarity than the document does. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I address the rereading of photographic representation as a phenomenological mediation between life and death, between absence and presence, as well as between memory and forgetting—themes which form the core of Różewicz’s multi-genre volume.

To effectively analyze Różewicz’s text, I use concepts from narrative rhetoric theory such as multi-voicing, focalizer, reliable versus unreliable narrator, implied author and narrative versus authorial audience. These categories of narrative rhetoric are essential in showing Różewicz as a re-reader and creator of his familial archive. I will also call on Jacques Derrida’s exegesis of the concept of the archive, as well as Roland Barthes’ meditation on transience and photography in *Camera Lucida*, as both the conception of the archive and the subject of photography as a vehicle of memory are key to the understanding of Różewicz’s text. Różewicz’s use of the photograph of his mother as a young woman on the volume’s cover and his constantly repeated phrase, “Mother’s eyes rest on me” (“Oczy matki spoczywają na mnie”), echoes a similar gesture made and, paradoxically, simultaneously subverted by Barthes in his famed *Camera Lucida* (1980). I claim that Różewicz’s reading of photography can be understood via the Barthesean *punctum*, which is meant to pierce and arrest the viewer of the photographic image with something that is special, almost beyond words, but operates rather at the level of physical response or emotion. Różewicz reads the photographs in his volume with acute intent, similarly to Barthes, ascribing the *punctum* to only one specific image.

Furthermore, Derrida’s exploration of the notion of an archive in his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) is helpful in reading Różewicz’s use and handling of his familial archive, in that Derrida’s deconstructive reading of the concept can be used to shed light on Różewicz’s use of documents and quasi-documents in his text. First, Derrida’s reading is hermeneutic, in that he explores the structure, meaning, and function of the archive. In fact, what is attractive about Derrida’s writing on the archive is that he stresses the open ended nature of his claims and characterizes them as “impressions” rather than assertions. Różewicz, in my view, constructs his archive in a similar way, from a series of impressions, series of texts, associations, and records which create an archive that is open ended: open to undisclosed secrets, untold stories,
omissions. However, Derrida views the archive also as a prosthesis, with a function not only of recording, but also of producing/creating the event, noting that the archived meaning is codetermined by the structure that archives. Moreover, he also ascribes an apriori spectral structure to the archive, one “neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh’, neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.” It is this presence and absence of photographic representation, remembering and forgetting of events, the presence and absence of the “spectre” of the mother’s eyes that Różewicz explores in his text. I argue that Różewicz’s reading and creation of the archive echoes one more of Derrida’s claims, what in my opinion is his key claim about the function of the archive. This is Derrida’s assertion that the archive is not about historization, but about the future, about “something to come.” Ultimately, Różewicz’s looking back and creating a familial archive, one accessible to the reading public, is also about that which is to come. Similarly to Derrida, he acknowledges the unreliability, the lack of clarity regarding the troubling nature of the archive. Yet he nonetheless wants to create and shape a prescribed reading of his poetic and familial origins, a reading which will speak for him when he no longer can.

1.1 Paradoxes of the *silva rerum*: Różewicz as reader of the familial archive

Grażyna Borkowska, in her reading of *Mother Departs*, argues that the lyrical subject disperses and disappears through the thematizing of speech from various perspectives, through the focus on silent “speaking” (seeing instead of speaking), and by means of the multiplicity of roles in which the poet appears (i.e., he is an egoistic creator who dreams about a great work of art, a son in pain who cares for a dying mother, a frustrated intellectual somewhat alienated from the world, a member of a loving family, a husband, a father, and, finally, a chronicler of his own sorrow). Addressing a constant motif of this work, that of the mother’s eyes focused on the son, Borkowska writes: “For the child, the mother’s eyes are a mirror, in which the child’s body is reflected, and in the mother’s eyes his/her dispersed identity and threatened existence is continuously affirmed.” Borkowska’s reading of the child’s image reflected in the mother’s eyes reminds me of the Lacanian mirror stage of infancy in which the child, fascinated by his or her mirror image, perceives his body as a harmonious unity, yet experiences it as fragmented (it
being uncoordinated). This discrepancy provides for the ego and “the subject forever split to pleasurable anticipation of wholeness in the future as well as to alienation.”

However, the lyrical subject of *Mother Departs* does not perceive his subjectivity from a child’s perspective of being in the world, although he returns to memories of childhood. The lyrical subject of the volume is rather a subjectivity faced with the finitude of old age, a perception through which he remembers and re-evaluates his life experience. As Kathleen Woodward shows, in the experience of old age, the mirror stage is inverted. The “whole” is felt as present within, not without, the subject, whereas the image of the mirror uncannily prefigures the disintegration and thus dependence characteristic of old age. It is this model of seeing the possible disintegration of subjectivity, of possible loss of one’s own cognitive coherence and memory, as well as the loss of control over the existence of one’s memory within a cultural sphere, that is threatening to Różewicz. It is a threat from without (from the unstoppable progression of time) and from within of one’s body and mind, which simultaneously provides refuge in the pleasure of mnemonic escape and fabrication and anxiety over the disintegration of memory. It is, thus, the anxiety and pleasure of memory that Różewicz explores in his late poetics. Borkowska argues that it is the emphasis on silent “speaking” (or seeing rather than speaking) that disperses and makes the lyrical subject disappear in Różewicz’s text. *Mother Departs* is a volume indeed based on the communicative strategy of “seeing” as well as speaking. The repetitious motto of the volume is: “Mother’s eyes rest on me”; however, it is the poet who looks at the mother looking at him. It is his gaze that is reflected in the mother’s eyes and provides the image/screen for texts included in this narrative. Namely, the authorial “I” is the focalizer who sets up the communicative situation of the volume. His memory focalizes the different multi-voiced narratives of this text.

I argue that one thing that Borkowska does not take into account is the fact that Różewicz’s volume, built around the exploration of his own and familial memory, is constructed on the model of a *silva rerum*. Despite being a hybrid, multi-genre, and multi-voiced work, it does not lead to a disappearance or fragmentation of the subject. On the contrary, it shows the subject as the chief reader and writer of the archive, whose memory is the primary mirror reflecting the past—one which demonstrates that the authorial subjectivity is the master-orchestrator of the quasi-documentary narrative and iconographic texts presented. Różewicz assigns titles to the
narratives, orders their presentation within the text, and, what is more, frequently requests their writing; some of these narratives were thus made-to-order to fit a certain compositional and conceptual whole.

The *silva rerum* form is in itself a memory book. This Latin term refers to a multi-genre home chronicle kept by many families of the Polish gentry, dating back to the 16-18th centuries. It was a collection that housed various texts: diary entries on present day events, memoirs, correspondence, copies of legal documents, anecdotes, genealogical trees, and moral, medical or agricultural advice. Namely, they included anything that the members of the family wanted to record and preserve for future generations. Przemysław Czapliński notes that the *silvic* form was at the height of its popularity in Polish letters in the 60s and 70s, naming such writers as Kazimierz Brandys, Leopold Buczkowski, Tadeusz Konwicki as the main authors of this type of text (he also includes the diaries of Witold Gombrowicz and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński as examples). *Silva* reappeared once again in the 1990s, with the publication in 1997, for example, of Czesław Miłosz’s texts, *Alphabet (Abecadło)* and *Road-side Dog (Piesek przydrożny)*. Due to its subject matter, Różewicz’s *Mother Departs* can be counted as an example of the postmodern *silva rerum*. Czapliński observes that there are ludic elements in the postmodern *silva*. Różewicz’s volume, being a “family apocrypha” or a “lament” lacks evident ludic elements, however it does not lack ironic humorous moments (particularly ones that pertain to the poet’s childhood). With this volume, Różewicz assesses the materiality of individual memory. He tests, primarily on himself, the fragility of memory, trace, recorded language, recorded image, and documents of private history.

*Mother Departs* is not the first or only example of *silva* in Różewicz’s works. Ryszard Nycz points to the poet’s *Preparation for an authorial reading (Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego)* (1977) and classifying it as *silva*, observes that the text consists of “a dialogue with the material [textual material] and objects, but also a private, intimate soliloquy in which the writer alone fulfills the basic role of a communication act being the sender, hero, and reader or critic of own texts.” In his book devoted to contemporary *silvic* texts, Nycz posits that in a *silva*, the beginning of the text should form and announce (by thematized or concealed means) the frame of communication in which the other parts of narrative will be inserted. These sub-headings such as: *Novel (Powieść), Reminiscences from the present (Wspomnienia z*
Preparation for an authorial reading (Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego) provide information about the frame of the communicatory situation, as well as the dominant functions of the text. Różewicz’s text devoted to the memory of his mother begins with an undated prose narrative entitled “Now” (“Teraz”) which is the frame setting for the communicative situation of this volume. The “Now” is a clear directive to the audience from which perspective the volume needs to be read (because it is written from such a perspective). Preparation for an authorial reading was a text clearly about the authorial subject, his oeuvre and creativity, whereas Mother Departs may be seen as a testimony to the memory of the poet’s mother. Yet in it, I propose, lies a testimony to the author’s childhood, poetic beginnings and familial origins, as well as an exercise of rereading memories and creating an archive for public consumption. Polish critics have commented on the undisputed truth and honesty of this testimony. Janusz Drzewucki wrote that “Różewicz’s honesty pierces to the point of pain” and described the mother’s narrative as characterized by “uncommon authenticity.” Piotr Śliwiński has remarked that Mother Departs is an „unusual proof of a son’s attachment” in which “what’s intimate closes the critic’s lips”. Similarly, Stanisław Gębala has asked: “What should we do with this, yet another testimonial of undisputable authenticity which refuses literary interpretation?” Skrendo distances himself from these critical voices by proposing that this volume is a book that utilizes literary mechanisms to appear as a document. However, this text is not only a testimonial to the mother’s memory, and in claiming so, I position my reading of this volume more in line with Skrendo’s interpretation than that any of the other critics. Yet, where I differ from Skrendo is in my approach to the “poetics of repetition” through memory with a particular focus on focalization.

I propose that Różewicz in the opening section titled “Now” (“Teraz”) thematizes the communicative situation where he is the addressee of his own voice turned into text. His private memories of obsessively returning motifs, but also the existing textual memory of his earlier works, are the lenses through which the texts of this volume are read. Writing from the “now”/ present position, the subject’s memory is the entrance key to his own psychic and textual past, as well as to the past of the narratives belonging to other authors in this volume. He is not a dispersed subjectivity, but rather a crafty focalizer who frames these texts to prescribe a particular reading.
1.2 The “now” of the communicative situation

The opening narrative fragment of Mother Departs, although titled “Now”, is undated. The author is leaving the present undefined so as to create the perpetual present or perpetual textual present; each time the reader picks up this text and opens the cover, the “now” is always that moment. The “now” is also an attempt to arrest the past in the present, or rather an unwillingness to venture into the future which due to our mortality is inevitably shrinking. I argue that the two themes which form the essence of this communicative situation are Różewicz’s poetic vocation and existential and creative finitude. The narrator signals the communicative situation as follows: “Now, as I write these words, my mother’s eyes rest on me. The eyes, mindful and tender, are silently asking, ‘what’s troubling you, my darling…? With a smile I reply, ‘nothing… everything’s fine Mummy, really,’ ‘but tell me,’ Mother says, ‘what’s the matter’” I turn my head away, look through the window…”24 The mother’s is a silent question, whereas the subject simultaneously does and does not welcome her inquiry. On the one hand, the mother’s eyes are “tender” and the subject replies to her with a smile. On the other hand, he evades her question, answers “nothing”, and turns his head to look out of the window. This eluding of communication is a repeated motif in the intertexts present within this volume, as well as in other texts of Różewicz’s oeuvre.

Różewicz highlights this paradoxical simultaneous inclination and unwillingness to establish communication. The subject turns away from the interlocutor in the poem titled “Wall” (Ściana”), originally from the author’s debut volume, Anxiety (Niepokój) (1947), and also reprinted, undated, within this volume. “She’s turned her face to the wall // oh but she loves me / why has she turned away from me // and so with one twist of the head / you can turn away from the world…”25 Skrendo suggests that if this poem were positioned and read outside of the context of these poems dedicated to the mother, it could be read as an erotic text. Only in the present context is the reader able to see the mother in the heroine of the poem.26 A similar turning away from the world is signalled in the poet’s observations and notes on his mother’s dying in Dziennik Gliwicki, recorded on the 25th of June 1957, and also included within this volume, within which he writes: “When the pain comes I just curl up and turn to the wall…”27 Finally, the image of the wall as an end of one’s existence appears in the undated poem “Return”
("Powrót"): “Suddenly the window will open / and mother will call me / time to go in // the wall will split / I’ll enter heaven in muddy boots…”

It is noteworthy that the wall, chosen as a barrier to communication by the subject himself/herself (when he turns his/her head to the wall to avoid a conversation or to avoid showing another person his/her pain, as Różewicz’s suffering mother had to do), disappears when the subject imagines communicating with his dead mother after he also passes into that “other realm”. The subject will hear the mother’s call “mother will call me”, the wall will open, and he will cross that threshold. With this notion of crossing to the “beyond”, guided by the mother’s spirit, Różewicz echoes the most famous scene of such otherworldly communication between a mother and a son of the Polish Renaissance, that of Jan Kochanowski’s *Trenos* (*Treny*) (1580). In Kochanowski’s *Tren XIX* however, the mother appears to the son in a dream holding his young deceased daughter Orszulka to communicate that his beloved child indeed lives on in heaven. I will leave the question of Różewicz’s faith or lack thereof aside, as it lies beyond the interest of my discussion, and point out that in his text the mother’s voice is a guide for the lyrical subject who, perhaps not without reservations, or alternatively having not fully shaken off his earthly materiality, enters the spiritual realm in his muddy shoes.

Beyond the aforementioned intertexts present within *Mother Departs*, Różewicz’s readers recall also the hero of *The Card Index* (*Kartoteka*, 1960) who spends his entire “textual performance” of the play in bed and turns himself towards the wall to avoid questions. As the author suggests “Maybe he will be laying with his face turned towards the wall until the end of this story.” In *The Card Index*, however, it is the farcical character Olga who pesters the hero with questions: “What’s with you? Explain yourself, say something.” The most popular interpretation of the play is its reading via the poem “Saved” (*Ocalony*), where the hero stands for the war generation, paralyzed by the experience of war, alienated and stripped of ideals. In *The Card Index*, the hero is of a similar age as its author and converses both with live and dead characters on the stage. Like Różewicz, he is a poet: “HERO screams with despair in his voice I am a poet, I am a poet! I am a poet!! The hero laughs I am a poet, I am a poet, I am… The hero cries.” As in the poems of that time period in which the lyrical subject repeats: “this cannot come together”, “I do not form a whole I was shattered and dismembered”, the hero or anti-hero of *The Card Index* experiences a state of disintegration of his identity. He declares: “I stand under the wall.
My brothers, my generation! I am speaking to you. The young and the old can’t understand us!” The poet anti-hero is surrounded by the multiplicity of forms, images, and meaningless chaos of the world, yet as Różewicz suggests when describing the original idea of this play in the 1958 volume *Forms (Formy)*, “All of us walk through this noise towards silence, towards explanation.” It is the wall/threshold of death that allows one’s existence to be “explained”, yet only to the ones who have already crossed this barrier. In his poem entitled “A conversation with a friend” (“Rozmowa z przyjacielem”) dedicated to his deceased friend, the writer Kornel Filipowicz, Różewicz contends: “you depart silent / explained by death.” Since Różewicz’s friend is silent, the lyrical subject turns to the texts that he left behind to maintain communication. That communicative situation is one of rereading his friend’s book, “I am reading your book / I try to remember / on what topic / our conversation ended”. As Różewicz himself nears existential threshold, he does not decry the disintegration of subjectivity, as he did in *The Card Index*. Rather, looking towards the threshold of existence and its silence, he muses on communicative situations that can remain (rereading the texts that remain, returning to one’s private archive of notes, papers, records, diaries, and looking at old photographs). Rereading his archive frequently means not only confronting his own foreseen experience of leaving, but also the departing of others, of many who have already left his life. This is the present and the “now” of this communication.

The subjectivity of the present, of the “now,” is not a disintegrated and disappearing subjectivity, as Borkowska suggests, but rather one who may fear disappearance and being forgotten or misunderstood. *Mother Departs* as a *silva* constitutes a dialogue between Różewicz and the living and the dead, with his earlier texts and his earlier textual subjects. Meanwhile, the motif of the wall or a window in the volume in question here, however, is one of existential crossing, of old age and of the physical suffering that can come with dying. It is a perspective on one’s life and creativity from the position of the *krisis* of death. The *krisis* of death, as Tomasz Węclawski posits, is a judgment over one’s life, over the wholeness of life, since in its closing stages life is seen as fully whole, in the sense that it cannot become anything more since it is already everything that it could have become. This wholeness, of course, does not rule out life’s inevitable fragments and inconsistencies both of experience lived and of memory, yet it is a wholeness which also must encounter fear of being misread, misunderstood, or forgotten. These intertextual motifs—of the poet’s vocation, and of inability to be understood—reappear in
Mother Departs. Węclawski draws on the Greek word “krisis” meaning judgment, from “krinein,” “to separate, decide, judge”, or “krinestai,” “to explain”. In Różewicz’s text the questions of judgment over one’s life, of one’s decisions and judgments, of one’s vocation, of one’s death, and finally, of the impulse to explain are all present.

Węclawski posits that the point of death as the possibility of wholeness is based on two antinomies. It gives the possibility to transgress that which in life was impossible, however this transgression “is all consumed in the present, it cannot reach anything beyond the present.” Death pushes us into nothingness, which can be filled only with “material from before the threshold of death.” Anticipating this approaching existential moment, Różewicz turns to memory. Thus, in Mother Departs, the anxiety expressed by the poet in The Card Index when the hero says to the audience: “You will leave here and forget about me. Isn’t that true? You’re forgetting already” still holds true. It is within the pleasure and anxiety of memory and forgetting, given that memory is seen as a creative and imaginative act rather than purely as an act of recall, that Różewicz stages his multi-genre and multi-voiced rereading of his life and vocation. Addressing this possibility of wholeness seen in death nevertheless must be fully “consumed”, realized as Węclawski suggests “in the now”; and it is indeed with “Now” (“Teraz”) that Różewicz’s narrator opens this volume.

Similarly as in The Card Index, the narrator of “Now” wants to evade questioning: “‘but tell me’, Mother says, ‘what’s the matter?’ I turn my head away, look through the window…” Looking out of the window has diametrically different connotations than turning towards the wall. One can look out of the window to evade conversation, to evade someone’s gaze, but also to contemplate the world outside, or to daydream. Even though the lyrical persona turns to the window, he still has a yearning to communicate his identity as a poet. Whereas in The Card Index, the hero was hysterically screaming “I am a poet, I am a poet”, in Mother Departs, the same motif gains the subtlety of a confession:

You know Mummy, I can tell it only to you in my old age, and I can tell you now because I am already older than you... I didn’t dare tell you when you were alive. I’m a Poet. It’s a word that frightened me, I never spoke it to Father... I didn’t know if it was decent to say something like that. // I entered the world of poetry as if into the light and now I’m preparing to exit, into darkness... Of course, Mother knows. [...] I know,
Darling’ Mother says ‘I’ve always known’ ‘Speak up’ says Father ‘I can’t hear a thing’...44

In the fictional world of The Card Index, in the identity of the anti-hero, and in the semi-autobiographical prose narrative “Now,” the issue of poetic vocation troubles the subject. I argue that Różewicz’s tactic in establishing this situational frame of communication in Mother Departs is characterized by what James Olney calls an “autobiographical act” which is a construct geared towards “ascertaining the meaning of one’s own existence.”45 This act based on memory is necessarily also an act of imagination since, as more and more critics argue, memory, to a greater extent than previously thought, is an act of imagination which serves the present.46 In Mother Departs this “confession” contains what I claim is the essence of the communicative situation of the prose fragment “Now”: the self-definition and purpose of one’s life (the poetic vocation) and the anxiety of existential threshold. This imagined conversation would be characterized by Anna Legeżyńska, who in her book Gest pożegniania. Szkice o poetyckiej świadomości elegijno-ironicznej (1999) wrote on the topic of late poetics, as an instance of “conversations with shadows”, an “elegiac setting of accounts” where the poet converses with those dearly departed, with friends, loved ones, and role-models.47 Legeżyńska argues that a common feature of these „conversations” is the topos of the Mother as a “teacher of the difficult art of farewells.”48 Indeed, in Mother Departs, the memory of the mother’s passing lends itself to the examination of one’s own inevitably approaching mortality. However, more significantly, this constructed memory of a conversation with the mother and father is a frame that focalizes the other reminiscences in this volume.

1.3 (Re) reading of intertextual memories

Mother Departs, as a silvic form composed of many voices and narratives, nonetheless preserves the communicative situation of the “genre”, that of the addressee and addressee being one entity. Różewicz converses with himself, the images present in his memory, and his earlier texts as a way of questioning the meaning of one’s existence and of the cohesion of biography seen from the point and perspective of his career nearing completion. Let us look at these intertextual conversations with himself and with his own texts first before we turn to the other voices or the multi-voicing strategy of this volume. To facilitate this search for his own narrative cohesion, the
poet creates symbolic analogies and parallels easily located in the texts. Within these intertextual allusions, Różewicz returns through lenses of memory and poetics of repetition, and thus also through the acts of rereading, to show a continuity of themes. He accentuates the focus on his authorial ‘I’, and stresses his own subjectivity, in opposition to the postmodern challenge to humanist notions of the coherent, continuous and autonomous individual. In this volume the strategies of poetics of repetition, which Skrendo identifies also in Różewicz’s earlier works, are still present. I want to point, however, to a different method of poetics of repetition, handled from the perspective of memory. It is a poetics of recall, rereading, rewriting and imagination, where the lyrical subject rereads from memory or from a former text and/or creates anew and inscribes as memory a particular theme or motif from the past. Returning to the past, he then provides a thematic analogy for this situation/ motif in the future. I highlight this narrative strategy of creating prescriptive links between the past and the present through the following three examples: a) a return to childhood to confront the object of beauty/aesthetics versus the world constructed from the aesthetics of fragments; b) a return to a childhood episode of fear of losing the mother versus the mother’s death recorded in 1957; c) a return to an earlier poem, “In the Midst of Life” (“W środku życia”) versus the opening prose narrative “Now” (“Teraz”) — all show continuation and permanence of motifs and themes in Różewicz’s oeuvre.

In the opening prose narrative “Now”, Różewicz inserts a prose fragment titled “In the Midst of Life” (sharing the same title as his 1955 poem, which is included in this fragment as well):

It is now sixty years since World War II broke out. I’m 77, 78 years old. I am a poet. At the start of the road I couldn’t believe in the miracle... that one day I’d become a poet, sometimes at night woken by nightmares and spectres I clutched at the thought ‘I shall be a poet’ I shall drive away spectres darkness death...I shall enter the light of poetry, the music of poetry, the Silence. // In this world another war is raging. One of the hundred that have raged continuously from the end of World War II until today...// My world that I tried to build for half a century is crumbling into fragments under the rubble of houses hospitals and temples man and god are dying, man and hope are dying, man and love. 51

This naïve youthful belief in poetic vocation and in poetry as an oasis with the power to reconstruct the order of the world and guard against death and paradoxically, the simultaneous lack of belief in the possibility of being a poet has its analogy in a childhood memory, where the child, presumably the future poet, reaches for a beautiful object and drops it, shattering it into
pieces. In a prose narrative entitled “Sin” (“Grzech”) dated to 1963, which appears towards the end of the volume *Mother Departs*, Różewicz’s narrator recalls this story from his childhood. The boy was sick one day and did not go to school. Lying in bed and reading a children’s magazine bored him, so he went to the kitchen to explore a beautiful vase which had been capturing his imagination for days. Against his mother’s orders to not touch the vase, the little boy could not resist the temptation: “I remember best the light and the vase. (…) I pulled at the tablecloth, the vase moved. (...) Then I pulled a little more strongly. (...) It fell so slowly, I could have caught it in the air… but the Devil held my hands.”

I read the story of childhood, “Sin,” and the abovementioned prose fragment “In the Midst of Life,” as analogous reflections on the initiation into the world of art and aesthetics. The child’s reaching for the mysterious and unattainable (purely aesthetic and non-functional object, since the narrator discloses that the vase was not meant to hold water or flowers) is a story of initiation. The narrator describes the mystifying light present in and around the vase which drew him in. For a moment the boy held the vase in his hand, only to pull at the tablecloth, causing the container to fall. The narrator humorously adds that he had time to catch the falling vase but the devil tempted him and “held his hands.” Perhaps, once touched, the mystery was already necessarily destined for disintegration. Also, conceivably, one’s literary struggles with aesthetics and form are always struggles with the unattainable imagined outcome, leading to disappointments with the end result of communication and final form. Sixty years after WWII (a traumatic event and a defining existential experience permanently marking Różewicz’s worldview and poetics) the writer needed to chase away “nightmares and demons, and death” and saw the world of poetry as a refuge of “light” and “quiet” that could help him conquer chaos. His 1947 debut volume *Anxiety* (*Niepokój*) was a response to the chaos of shattered ethics following the war. Różewicz’s diagnosis of his poetry in the “In the Midst of Life” prose fragment is one of a despondent subject illustrating his rather catastrophist worldview. Historical evils occur in a cyclical continuum, the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, have died, and the world which he tried to reconstruct in his poetry is spiralling disastrously downwards. One wonders whether the vase episode wasn’t a prefiguration of things to come. Despite the poet’s repeated rescue attempts, the world shatters around him. Moreover, letting things fall is inevitable: reconstruction is not only associated with aesthetics but also with the nature of memory, which is unavoidably permeated with forgetting.
In the poem “Building” (“Buduję”), from his 1964 volume *The Face* (*Twarz*), the poet writes: “I walk on glass / on a mirror / which cracks // I walk on Yorick’s skull / I walk on this fragile / world // and build a house / a castle on ice / everything is in it / prepared for siege // only I am / helpless caught by surprise / on the outside / of the walls.”\(^{54}\) Reconstruction and construction are constantly attempted, however the foundations of the edifice are fragile, a castle built on ice: hence, the cracking “glass mirror.” The tradition and values of European culture were shattered by the horrors of war and the Holocaust (hence he attempts to build on Yorick’s skull). The subject, however, is vulnerable as he attempts his reconstruction, finding himself caught by surprise outside the protective structure which he is building. Isn’t, then, reconstruction only an illusion of safety, an everyday task of “building” which is synonymous with living, coping and surviving? Roughly two decades later, Różewicz discloses a changed attitude to the idea of allowing things to disintegrate and fall. In a poem entitled “Now” (“Teraz”), we read: “in the past / I kept watch / any moment / poetry could get hold of me / I run until I was breathless / after an image which moved // now / I let poems / run away from me / deteriorate forget / decay // no movement / towards realization.”\(^{55}\) The old poet seems to have lost the urgency associated with poetic “(re)construction” and “building,” accepting the inevitable life forces of fleeting moments, passing time, forgetting, and the disappearance of things. This acceptance, however, pertains only to certain themes and issues; others, as we see in *Mother Departs*, are still anxiously guarded from forgetting.

Here, I concur with Evelyn Ender, who in her book on textual memory, *Architexts of Memory: literature, science, and autobiography* (2005), posits that childhood memories which we invent become the foundations of our life stories.\(^{56}\) Ender’s claim falls in line with Olney’s assertion that an autobiographical act is a construct meant to confirm the meaning of one’s life. I argue that Różewicz returns to these childhood memories with the aim not only of preserving them in text, but also of establishing a certain foundation for his life story. The story of the childhood episode with the vase asserts Różewicz’s subject’s identity as someone who struggles with his poetic vocation. After all, Różewicz declares in the opening text of *Mother Departs* that he had difficulty announcing to his parents that he was a poet, and in fact never claimed this identity for himself in his relationship with them (meaning he never had the courage to declare: “Mummy, (...) I didn’t dare tell you when you were alive. I’m a Poet. (...) I never spoke it to Father... I didn’t know if it was decent to say something like that.” In 1958, the poet wrote “My greatest
fault, which I cannot deny, is the act of writing itself. “57 Rather than echoing Miłosz’s famous question from Ocalenie (1945): “What is poetry which does not save?” in Mother Departs, Różewicz’s position is closer to that of a younger New Wave poet, Ryszard Krynicki, who answers: “What more can it be / if not fearful / like a beat of a mortal heart, stronger than fear of poverty and death / voice of conscience?”58, although Różewicz never treated the “conscience” of poetry in a political way as Krynicki did. Poetry is a voice of conscience in Mother Departs as Różewicz longs to give homage to his mother’s memory and preserve what he can from the fragments of her experience. This attempt to remember and memorialize her is necessarily also an attempt at creating his own story of origins. It is a story formed from rereading and rewriting, as the poet constructs his mother’s story not only from her narratives, but also from his own memories, his own earlier texts, and the texts of others. Preserving the memories of her life, he would be also preserving his own self, the memory of his origins, and private familial history. Whereas in the past the poet accepted that his close relationships may suddenly end without goodbyes, last conversations, or other forms of closure, Mother Departs is an attempt at paying a debt to his mother’s memory, and in a way of having a final conversation with her.

In his poem “Reading books” (“Czytanie książek”), published in Bas-Relief (Plaskorzeźba) (1991), Różewicz wrote: “more and more often I do not finish poems / short stories letters / I did not finish the letter to Wirpsza / I found out he died / I wrote a note to Zbyszek / I sent it without an address / it got returned / Zbyszek still smiles / but his wife cries / and says that / she cannot speak.”59 The passage of time and of life in this poem is measured as a narrative, textual time (reading books, writing stories and poetry, letters, postcards) and although sometimes friends die before our letters and messages reach them, this is a fact of life that is not perceived as an event of trauma, but rather one of regret. There is a sense of necessary resignation and compliance in Różewicz’s procrastinations and certain acts of belatedness as he knows they cannot be remedied. As the poet nears the end of his life, however, some unfulfilled conversations, unpaid debts, and forgetting seem to become issues more troubling and more pressing, and Mother Departs serves as a prime example.

Another return to a childhood memory, be it real or imagined, in order to build a textual analogy with an adult experience of the death of the parent is the story of a child’s fear of his mother leaving the kids/ going away. In the opening prose narrative “Now,” the subject recalls a time
when he was just five years old and his mother said: “‘I shall leave you ... you’re so naughty... I shall go and won’t ever come back’ (...) I found myself in emptiness and darkness (...) and today I still remember my fear and despair. (...) but mum didn’t go away she was with us and she will be... now as I write these words... mother’s searching eyes are on me.” Recalling his childhood anxiety leads to what seems like an assertion of wish-fulfillment in the present. The mother did not leave, she remained, and will remain with them (in memory), as her eyes continue to observe the adult subject. Textual analogies to this reminiscence are the notations in Dziennik Gliwicki from 1957, recorded at the time and shortly after the mother’s death. Różewicz presents his diary entries as factual documents from the writer’s private diary. Although fragments of the poet’s Dziennik Gliwicki have been published before in literary magazines (such as Odra for example), the entries pertaining to the death of the mother were not disclosed until the publication of Mother Departs. Here, mourning the loss of the mother, the poet, by means of a childhood reminiscence, asserts her presence. Under the date of July 16, 1957 (Tuesday) we read: “1 o’clock at night — Mother is dying. ‘Take me.’ It’s 10 o’clock in the morning, Mother hasn’t died yet. It started pouring. Neither Father nor Staś has arrived yet. ‘Take me, take me, mummy’ — she reached out her hands, not to me. Mother died at 10:20 in the morning. Carcinoma ventriculi.” It is noteworthy that his dying mother stretches out her arms, calling for her own mother; similarly, Różewicz depicts his own imagined passing in parallel fashion, his own response to his mother’s voice. Two days after the funeral, on July 20th, (Saturday), the poet writes: “Staś and Father left today. I’m sitting alone in the room, in my ‘study’. It’s quiet. Mum I am talking and will always be talking to you. (…) I shall be talking to you, I’ll work thinking of you.”

This intertextual analogy, as I have already suggested, amounts to wish-fulfillment in the present. The fright associated with the mother’s threat in childhood and with her final passing recall the famous fort and da game described in Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). Freud wrote this text after his encounter with veterans of WWI whose dreams brought them back to the traumas of war that they had witnessed. As Cathy Caruth posits, Freud’s encounter with these repetitive dreams of war brought about the beginning of the theory of trauma. The hero of Freud’s text however, is the child playing the fort and da game. When playing with a wooden spool on a string, each time the toddler throws the spool from his cot, he exclaims “o-o-o-o” and retrieves it with an excited “a-a-a-a.” Freud interprets the child’s game and speech with the help
of his mother, arriving at the conclusion that the child in his game is re-enacting the mother’s departure and return. He writes: „This then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule one witnessed only its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act.” Caruth, in her reading of Freud, links Freud’s initial question, “What does it mean for life to bear witness to death,” with her own: “what kind of witness is a creative act?” Moreover, she suggests that “[r]epeating the fort that is not his own, but his mother’s act of leaving, the child’s own life story—his departure into life—becomes inextricable from his mother’s silent departure into death.” She reads the act of memorialization as an act taking place through separation and also an act of creation affirmed in language. I read Różewicz’s childhood memory, in which he recalls the mother’s threat of leaving, as a pleasure of mnemonic repetition or narration as an act of pleasure in the face of the anxiety of forgetting. Różewicz asserts his mother’s presence “you’re by my side” as a “magical ritual” of wish-fulfilment: “I’ll talk to you as if you were next to me.” Throughout the course of Mother Departs, as well as this chapter, we will see that this is a wish which suffers disappointment. As forgetting seeps in, Różewicz rereads his notations in Dziennik Gliwicki from 1957 to remember, but also to fulfill, that promise of a dialogue which may have been forgotten.

The last example of textual analogies which I give as an illustration both of Różewicz’s rereading of intertextual memory in this volume and of his narrative strategy of creating links between the textual past and the present, is a prose fragment from the opening narrative “Now,” which is followed by the famed poem dating to 1955, “In the Midst of Life.” Reflecting on human bestiality and brutality seen and heard daily in media reports, the old poet returns to a textual memory of his post-war poem in which he addressed the necessity of relearning ethics:

A poet! He grew old he stands on death’s doorstep and still he hasn’t understood that a knife is for hacking heads off hacking off noses and ears what is a knife for? For cutting heads off… some place over there, far? near? what else is a knife for? for cutting out tongues that speak in foreign tongues and for cutting open the bellies of pregnant women cutting off the breasts of nursing mothers cutting off genitals gouging out eyes… and what else can we look at on television? read in the papers? hear on the radio? […] now as I write these words mother’s quiet eyes are on me on my hand on these maimed blinded words.
What follows is a citation of the poem "In the Midst of Life": "After the end of the world / after death / I found myself in the midst of life / creating myself / building life (...) the knife is for cutting the bread / bread feeds people / man must be loved (...) what must be loved / man I answered." Różewicz mimics the question and answer rhetoric of the poem in the prose narrative. The essence of this intertextual parallel lies in the fact that from the perspective of an old man, the issues of his earlier poetry are still relevant to contemporary reality, which is just as filled with human bestiality as was the post-catastrophe world which he tried to rebuild in his post-war poetry. Różewicz’s obsessive returns to textual and childhood memories which stand as an analogy to the present are also openly self-reflexive. After all, the subject candidly asks, “Is a poet a man who writes lamentations dry-eyed, so that he can see the form clearly? Who must put all his heart into making sure the form’s ‘perfect’...? A poet: a man without a heart? And now the wailing in front of an audience at a book fair, the poetic indulgences, the Literary Stock Exchange. (...) But even now I’m writing—dry-eyed— and ‘correcting’ these beggarly lamentations of mine…” Once again Różewicz alludes to Kochanowski, who in his Trenos, dedicated to the memory of his deceased daughter, self-reflexively declares: “Nor will I speculate what fame / These elegies might bring” (“Ani mi teraz lacno dowiadać się o tym, / Jaka mię z płaczu mego czeka część na potym.”) The writer, even in a volume like Mother Departs, which some critics read as a “testimonial (...) which refuses literary interpretation,” adopts a narrative strategy where both the biography of the object (the text) and the biography of the subject (its creator) become the topic of inquiry. This leads to a different conception of writing [and in this case also rereading and rewriting], of writing as “bio-graphy.” Highlighting the biography of the object (the text) and the subject (the writer) is a strategy that Różewicz uses in these textual mnemonic returns to his earlier oeuvre. Różewicz’s poetic volumes starting in the 1990s abound in facsimiles of earlier hand-written and edited versions of poems which show the process of writing, thus also the bio-graphy of the text. Różewicz alludes to the fact that his own elegiac volume dedicated to his mother clearly has provenience in the Renaissance Trenos of Kochanowski. Yet what is the point of this reminder if a reader familiar with Polish literature clearly already recognizes this? Moreover, what is the purpose of the intertextual returns to his earlier oeuvre? Różewicz here is his own reader, who traces the naiveté of his youthful wish for power of poetry to restore or rebuild ethics / order and keep chaos at bay, and coinciding recognition in the naiveté of this wish to his later disillusion and defeat, and
finally to his acceptance of forgetting, letting his poems leave him and disappear. By selecting these intertexts himself and drawing parallels for the reader, he also points his audience to a certain prescribed reading of the bio-graphy of these texts and of his oeuvre. He is a reader who retrospectively connects the intertexts for his authorial audience and guides us with respect to how to read his poetic mission and how to read his texts. Moreover, the narrative strategies of easily identifiable mnemonic returns to childhood in order to find their parallels in the material text-ure of adult experience call attention to the authorial rereading of his memory accessed in the “now” (in the act of writing the present text), of the texts of his earlier oeuvre, and of the memory already represented in text of his earlier works. In a way, Różewicz presents a ready-made compendium on his poetic mission for the busy or somewhat lazy reader. It is noteworthy that he returns to these most famous and widely known of his poetic tropes and texts. After all, the poem “In the Midst of Life” is one of the most famous of Różewicz’s career work. Różewicz wants his reader to make the connection with these famous examples immediately and be able to trace the parallels and differences in the perspective of the author on his own oeuvre and its mission in the past and in the present.

2 The paradox of multi-voiced narratives

2.1 The mother’s voice

As already mentioned, Mother Departs is a silvic form consisting of a multiplicity of texts and voices. Różewicz includes texts from his familial archive, yet we need to keep in mind that some of these were texts made to order (for instance, he asked his brother, Stanisław, to write a reminiscence especially with the publication of this volume in mind). The “other voices” in this text are that of Różewicz’s mother, his older brother Janusz, and his younger brother Stanisław. There is no text narrated by Różewicz’s father to complete these records of familial archive, yet the poet still attempts to preserve his voice by including three of his poems dedicated to his father. The reader also notes a logical chronology in which these silvic texts appear. Both narratives attributed to Stefania Różewiczowa raise questions as to their authenticity. We learn from Tadeusz Drewnowski that Różewicz requested both narratives from his sick mother shortly before her death; however, nowhere in the volume is this information disclosed. Thus the
unsuspecting reader approaches these narratives as pages selected from a larger text of memoirs left by Różewicz’s mother.

It is moreover somewhat peculiar that Stefania Różewiczowa recalls solely her youth and nowhere mentions her illness. We encounter the first text quite early in the volume (on page 14). This undated text is titled “The village of my childhood” (“Wieś mojego dzieciństwa”) and signed “Stefania Różewicz” at the end of the narrative. The title appears in square brackets; however, from the publisher’s note found at the end of the collection, the reader learns that this title (as well as all titles presented within square brackets) are not original titles of the texts, but were added by Różewicz later. This first narrative attributed to Różewicz’s mother aims to describe her own origins (her early youth, education, and the village where she came of age). It is also interesting that she does not mention her Jewish heritage. Thus, the narrative begins with the introduction of the village: “In the Tsar’s day (…) Szynklelew belonged to the guberniya of Kalisz, the powiat of Wieluń. There are two manors: the local gentry’s and the Governor General’s. The village itself is large. Although not as poor as other villages, there is a great deal of poverty here. The roads are terrible. (…) There is no school, to reach church people have to walk nine kilometres.”

This narrative describes the life of the village (people’s beliefs and customs, health care or lack thereof, the appearance of houses, how people celebrated church holidays, baptisms and weddings, their common diet, the norms of childcare, education etc.). Różewicz’s mother, seen against this background, is among the fortunate few enlightened and educated people (for one, she is literate) who can provide a critical perspective on the life of the village of her youth. Although the narration spans several pages, it does not contain any headings that would be helpful in increasing the readability of the text. Różewicz seems to want to maintain the organic nature of the text, and thus preserves both its form and specific language.

The reader notes that the narrative voice aims to offer a detailed description of the village yet focuses mostly on others, not herself. Thus we are provided with details of people’s daily reality, highlighting poverty: “The village was horribly neglected. (…) Children were undernourished. (…) Smallholders couldn’t afford to keep a work horse, so they had to labour for the better-off, who later helped them transport their manure in return, sometimes corn. (…) There were no mattresses. You could say people lay in bare straw, usually several slept in one bed.” We get a sense that Różewicz’s mother belonged to the privileged class since, as I already mentioned, she
was literate; moreover, she was also politically aware. Thus, we note the difference of education and perspective between her (the narrator) and the majority of the village’s inhabitants: “I often chatted with people on Sundays, when they came to have their correspondence with relatives in Germany written or read out to them. I tried to tell them that if we were not in bondage, we’d be much better off. Because as things are, who cares about Poles? (...) I could see that they were not convinced, they quickly changed the subject.”

The reader also notes that the narrator of this text is self-reflexive. We know that Różewicz’s mother is aware that her text may be read in the future by an audience, yet what kind of audience she expects remains undisclosed. At one point of the narrative she comments: “I am describing these two people whom I knew to help readers realise what living conditions were like for folk who really had so much to offer to the culture and the community.” This phrase gives us an indication that this text may in fact have been written upon request, probably the request of her literati son, who may have asked for his mother’s reminiscences of her youth precisely for the purpose of their preservation (perhaps even in published form). I suggest that this text may have been written at Różewicz’s request since the narrator highlights the prospective wasted potential of certain inhabitants of the village as contributors to the country’s culture. The reader reads between the lines and understands that she views her son to be such a valued contributor.

Since this text is undated, we don’t know when these narrative recollections were made by Stefania Różewicz, or if, in fact, they were indeed written by her. It is rather curious that Różewicz does not include any facsimile of the handwritten text of this narrative (as he does, for example, of his mother’s letter dated to 1943 and included on pages 94-5 of this collection; or of a facsimile of his own agenda page from 1957, included on pg. 109). Thus, this text may or may not be a document. It may have been penned by the poet himself based on his mother’s oral narrative, yet this remains within the realm of hypothesis on my part.

The second prose text is also attributed to the poet’s mother (similarly signed with her name at the end), yet this one clearly focuses on the real hero of this collection, Tadeusz Różewicz. The title of this text, presented without square brackets, suggesting that it was originally penned with this title, is “9th of October, 1921” (Rok 1921, 9 października). Różewicz’s audience knows, this date corresponds to the poet’s birthday; and the narrative voice recounts the birth of her son:
I was slightly disappointed because I had really been wishing for a daughter. He was a healthy plump baby. He had little black curls reaching nearly halfway down his neck. The baby was exceptionally quiet. His father was proud he had another son… At his christening we gave him the name Tadeusz, because this was what his big brother really wanted. I asked him, ‘Januszek, what name shall we give your brother?’ He replied ‘Tadeusz Kościuszko.’ He took a liking to it because we had a big portrait of General Kościuszko hanging on the wall.79

The narrative ends with “Tadeusz was born on the 9th of October 1921 in Radomsko, at 12 Reymont Street, near the little river Radomka.”80 This appears to be a text requested by Różewicz, since there are no reminiscences of the birth of the other two sons in this volume. There is a documentary character to this narrative, as its closing sentence stresses the exact date and address of the birth of the future poet. Some fragments are of an anecdotal nature: the mother provides details of the baby’s appearance, and also the story of the origins of his name.

The latter anecdote brings to the reader’s attention, for the first time in this volume, Różewicz’s older brother, Janusz, referred to as “Nusek” (no doubt from the diminutive of his name – Januszek). Within the context of naming the child (and thus establishing a certain patronage over him from birth), the reader notes a patriotic allusion in the abovementioned anecdote, as Kościuszko was a general who led the Polish uprising which came to be christened by his name: the 1794 Kościuszko Uprising (Powstanie Kościuszkowskie), which took place against imperial Russia. This echo of patriotism serves also as a natural textual transition to the series of poems which follow the prose narrative in this collection. The reader knows that Różewicz largely credits his older brother Janusz with the initiation of his poetic journey (Janusz, a gifted student, was the first budding poet of the family; he took an active role in the armed struggle against the occupier during WWII and was killed by Gestapo). Różewicz recalls Janusz’s story as well as some of his early literary works in a book dedicated to his brother, Nasz starszy brat (1992)81. In Matka Odchodzi, he links the mother’s reminiscence of his own birth with her grief of losing her eldest son. Therefore, following her narrative titled “9th of October 1921” (“Rok 1921, 9 października”), we are presented with a series of poems of various dates which together tell the story of the two deaths (Janusz’s and later, the mother’s).
2.2 The focalizer: presenting *Mater Dolorosa*

Let us look at three examples of these poems to show that the motif of the son’s wartime arrest and death and the image of the grieving mother reoccur multiple times. The short poem which directly follows the second of the prose texts accredited to the poet’s mother is titled “Hands shackled” (”*Ręce w kajdanach*”). It is an undated text which (in part) reads: “(…) An open mouth like a wound / and the hands the shackled hands / and the wracked bodies / where the mothers stand // The mothers’ fragile hands / twisted by horror and blood / make the word flesh / make the light God // Crying our sons like yours / were defenceless and small / for their sake and for your small son / take the pain from them all (…)”82 The poem alludes to a body of the son who has been captured and subjected to torture; moreover, Różewicz notes that such was the fate of more than one son and grief of countless mothers. The text also evokes the figure of the grieving mother or *Mater Dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows) in the Christian context of Mary grieving the sorrows of her life; in particular, grieving the death of her Son. The poem that follows, “Twice condemned” (”*Dwa wyroki*”), further reinforces the idea of the two lives, that of the mother and son, as interconnected. The poetics of this poem also differs vastly from the previous “*Ręce w kajdanach*.” While in the former, Różewicz stylizes his poetics on a Romantic ethos, the present example showcases an image of pathos in an ordinary domestic setting in a simple, everyday language. The two acts of sentencing from the text’s title pertain to both the son and the mother, the latter of whose life ends in grief: “I see a smile / pulled down from the white face / against the wall. // Death’s messenger a Stranger / bent his head / lower. // I see / a comic statue of anguish / in flapping slippers / by the stove / a small crooked / figurine / of a petrified mother.”83 Like the mythical bereaved mother Niobe, the grieving mother becomes a figure of stone; she is portrayed as a poor, pathetic mother seen within the everyday domestic sphere, appearing in old slippers by the stove. This motif of the grieving mother seen within the domestic sphere appears again in the next poem (undated) entitled “Dead fruit” (”*Martwy owoc*”). This time however, the lyrical subject introduces the motif of memory and its aids (here: photography): “On the table the photo of a youth / upright and bright in the black kepi …// The poor mother steps across the room / adjusts the photograph and cries // The gold suns on the table darken / as does the dead fruit of her life.”84 What remains from the “fruit of her life” is only a photograph. (I will return to the concept of a photograph as an object and tool of memory within the familial archive later on within this chapter). With these motifs of the grieving mother,
Różewicz inscribes his mother’s life experience into that of her generation (sharing the experience of all the mothers who lost their sons during the war and also in to the literary tradition of grieving mothers in Polish literature). The poet guides the reader towards an understanding that this loss was the defining experience of his mother’s life.

Seen in the context of the volume, and in the context of their immediately neighbouring texts, the prose narratives attributed to Różewicz’s mother gain an outside focalizer who interprets the chief events of her life as irrevocably interconnected with the lives of her sons. Her voice as the narrator’s does not in any way determine either her own audience or the context in which her narrative is ultimately placed. Her narratives fall within the other voices of this volume, and it is the other voices which shape the reception of her voice / narration and experience.

2.3 Comprehensive archive: the voice of the father

What is the purpose of the other texts and voices in this volume and what role do they play within Różewicz’s silvic narrative? The reader notes that Różewicz attempts to present a comprehensive familial archive in *Mother Departs* and as such aims to showcase the voice of each member of his family. Therefore, the voices of two of his brothers, the already mentioned elder, Janusz, and the youngest, Stanisław, are also heard within this collection. Before encountering their texts, however, the reader comes across the voice of the father. Even though Różewicz’s volume does not contain a text authored by the patriarch of the family, I propose that the poet attempts to include his voice (and thus give a complete account of all family members) in the incorporation of four poems devoted to the memory of his father. What is more, two of these have a dialogic structure, where the father’s voice is remembered in conversation with his son’s. The first poem, titled “Granddad’s visit” (“Odwiedziny dziadka”), is dedicated to the father and dated to 1954. The poem records a reminiscence of his father’s visit while Różewicz’s first born son, Jan, was still a baby. The visit is marked by the father’s reminiscences (which are similar in nature to his mother’s reminiscences about her youth): “and remembers being young / the family their village / various countries / the fact that he went to St. Petersburg / that he lived in a yurt in Siberia / that he drank camel’s milk in Kirghizia / about ghosts maidens married women / and priests’ housekeepers / plump white as pigeons / who soon loved more than religion.” The vastness of these reminiscences, spanning many topics, places, and years, and
their conversational, boisterous tone, bring to mind “gawęda szlachecka.” This was a genre popularized in Polish literature already in the seventeenth century by Jan Chryzostom Pasek\(^87\), characterized by stories from the everyday life of the gentry, rendered in conversational tone and stylized according to oral expression.\(^88\) Perhaps Różewicz is aiming to stylize his father as a gentleman who is alike to those of the Sarmatian gentry: jovial, fanciful of drink, and a teller of somewhat embellished stories. The poem also emphasizes certain expressions which may have been characteristic of his father’s speech, such as: “‘no need I’m not hungry darling’”; ‘somehow slowly you do push / the wheelbarrow of life’ or “says granddad / ‘every horse needs four legs’ / and then / ‘four walls and the roof makes five’ / after the fifth toast / granddad starts singing a song / ‘there was a host / who had no house…”\(^89\)

Another example of a poem (dated to 1999) which focuses on a conversation and recalls the patriarch’s voice is titled “the two choppers (77)” (“dwie siekierki”). The lyrical subject remembers:

> When Father turned / 77/ he told me / ‘the two choppers, Tadziu, / once a man gets / through them, after that / everything gets smooth / as butter’ // (...) I remember one question / from that birthday conversation of ours / ‘tell me, Dad, / is life worth living?’// Father studied / the smoke rings / he flicked ash from his cigarette / and said // ‘course it’s worth it!’ / then he looked at me / ‘what’s up…Tadziu!‘…’ // Then I understood / that Father loved us / but didn’t talk about it\(^90\)

Although Różewicz does not devote a lot of space in this collection to the figure of his somewhat distant father, he still maintains a certain balance in terms of commemorating his memory. In Mother Departs, he also includes a poem about his father’s death. Since the poem remains undated, we don’t know if it was composed at the time of his death or for the purpose of the current collection. Różewicz titled the poem “Lódź,” and in it recalled not only certain details of his father’s passing, but also a nostalgic childhood reminiscence:

> Don’t cry / after all you didn’t love him / he’s an object / to carry out of the house // windows half open discreetly / in a boat / without oars / leaving the world / sailing away / father // a wooden coffin / run aground tangled in flowers / green spruce wreaths / paper ribbons // father lived for / ninety years / died February 1977 // don’t cry // oh but I did love him / inside my eyelids a tiny image / father carrying an evergreen tree / a stand and an axe / wades / through deep snow / on the table coloured paper chains / stars angel hair // let the earth lie light on him\(^91\)
The poet does not note the precise date and time of his father’s death (as he does for his mother), nor does he disclose any details (we don’t know if he had any involvement in his care prior to death), yet the act of giving honour to his life and memory is undoubtedly present. The interlocutor of this poem is either someone else who knew the nature of the poet’s relationship to his father, or perhaps the poet himself. Despite the ambiguity of the father’s presence and of their emotional connection (the father does not have a large presence in this family archive), yet his figure, his voice, a fond memory of him, and an acknowledgement of love are still there. In the first two poems dedicated to the figure of the father, Różewicz emphasizes his father’s voice; in the last one, he reflects on his death and what remains of his memory. In all poems however, it is always the father seen through the eyes and in relation to his middle son, the poet. Różewicz remains the sole focalizer, who selects key memories of his father from his own life. Through returns and rereading of these mnemonic and textual reminiscences, he honours his father’s voice and life. Nonetheless, it is always his view, his focalization, and his subjectivity that are the focus.

2.4 The Brothers: Voices of Janusz and Stanisław

The recollection of the father belongs solely to the lyrical voice of the above cited poems, and neither of the Różewicz brothers mentions the father in their texts. This fact, however, only serves to reinforce that the lyrical persona of the implied author of this collection is the focalizer of this familial archive. The reader observes also that there is a certain directive which characterizes the narratives belonging to Janusz and Stanisław Różewicz. The text penned by Janusz has the characteristics of a document (it is a fragment of his letter dating to the 25th of May, 1940). As with some previous texts, this one is titled by the poet for the purpose of this publication, as indicated by the title, which appears in square brackets: “[the way home from school] [a fragment from a letter]” (Droga ze szkoły do domu [fragment listu]). Although the title announces that this is a fragment of a letter, the reader never finds out who was the addressee of this text; moreover, the contents seem more fitting for a journal / diary entry than for a letter.
The text is a descriptive impression of a day. Janusz describes the last day of classes before the summer break, and reflects on the fact that it is his name day. The reader learns of a ritual associated with Janusz’s name day: his mother always places flowers on his pillow on that day (lilies of the valley, sometimes jasmine or lilacs): “The day began with white lilies of the valley… This means it is my name day today. You see it’s been years since I started to find lilies of the valley that day lying across my quilt in the morning. Sometimes it’s jasmine. But this year the jasmine has not yet blossomed… Now I am sitting at my desk and thinking about myself. I think it’s right to devote an hour once a year to thinking about such an important person as Mr Janusz Różewicz.” Janusz’s narrative does not mention the mother directly in any way. The reader only learns that she is referred to indirectly, as the one who greets him with flowers on his name day, from a subsequent narrative attributed to the youngest of Różewicz’ brothers, Stanisław. In his reminiscence of childhood he mentions: “On his name day, Janusz always finds lilies of the valley or sometimes jasmine on his bedcovers when he wakes up: that’s mum…”

Since Janusz’s text concentrates mainly on a brief impression of one day, the reader needs to ask: what is its role in a volume entitled Mother Departs? It is not a reminiscence of the mother. I claim that Różewicz includes this text to highlight a few points: that the first born was very special to their mother; but that, while she may have been instrumental in instilling in the lives of her sons a sensitivity to nature and beauty (hence flowers), she did not factor in necessarily as a prominent figure in a typical day in the life of her young adult son, hence she is not mentioned. I posit that Różewicz includes this text since it may have been one of the last texts penned by his brother, and since it conveyed the youthful optimism and potential of the budding poet. Although already more than eight months into the war, Janusz still attended school in 1940. The only hint that the beauty of spring he describes may be about to be interrupted appears in one comment, noting that this week of school may be the last: “the foremost and the nicest (or possibly simply the last?) week of study…” Why that week was referred to as the “first” remains undisclosed, but the fact that it may be the last hints at the looming threat to the ordinary routine of a student. Apart from that subtle hint, the narrative remains upbeat in tone, filled with the energy, happiness and optimism of youth. We read that “the last lesson – you rush quickly out from the dark corridor – your bag isn’t even heavy… shoes clatter on the pavement’s grey cement squares… the rapid stream of navy blue hats and uniforms berets and black pinafores (…)
everything feels awfully light and it isn’t me walking, something is walking me…now my shadow is jumping all over the fence – simply the sun’s projections…”

Within the context of the other voices of this volume, this text remains the only one free from the mark of external focalization. Others have the characteristics of texts “made to order”, written upon request from the poet, and created with a particular directive in mind. All the other texts (the two texts attributed to the mother and the one closing the volume attributed to the poet’s younger brother, Stanisław) are reminiscences of youth and childhood. In the first of her texts, Stefania Różewicz recalls her youth and the village where she grew up; in the second, she focuses on the birth of her middle son, the poet and her role as a mother. Stanisław recalls his childhood and reminisces about his mother and his older brother, Tadeusz. Only Janusz’s text, selected, and thus not written on request, maintains its autonomy and remains free from the influence of outside focalization, although its choice is still Różewicz’s.

In order to further substantiate this claim, I aim to show the contrast between fragments of Janusz’s letter cited above and the text that follows it, which is attributed to Stanisław Różewicz. The Polish reader of this volume probably knows that the youngest of the Różewicz brothers became a film director; hence, the references to cinema in his reminiscence are particularly pertinent. Stanisław Różewicz died in November of 2008, yet Mother Departs was published in 1999, so his text was most likely written with the publication of his brother’s collection in mind. Therefore, Tadeusz Różewicz’s focalization, both in terms of the content of the text, as well as its form, may have played a significant role in the end.

The prose narrative is titled “In the kaleidoscope…” (“W kalejdoskopie…””) and it is the text that closes the volume. Note that the figure of the mother plays a significant role in this reminiscence. The narrative begins with a description of an ordinary daybreak of Stanisław’s childhood: “Mum gets up first, lights the stove, makes breakfast before father leaves to catch the train.” When recalling his first encounter with school, his mother also plays a prominent role: “We walk down a long corridor, I’m in a little dark velvet uniform, I stand in front of the headmaster, Mr Kupczyński. Mum tells him I learned to read all by myself…” Other childhood encounters and initiations also highlight the mother’s role: “Mum’s holding my hand. We’re walking. It’s December, to meet Santa Claus”; “My first trip with Mum to ‘theatre’. The Charitable Society
Finally, the narrator highlights the instrumental role of his mother in the introduction of the future film director to the cinema: “I’m older and mom’s taking me to The Kinema, the picture house at the fire station. Through the little window with multicoloured panes you can see the ticket clerk. Mum always buys seats up on the balcony. (…) The huge chandelier under the ceiling dims and we watch The Hurricane, The Prince and the Pauper, The Crusades with Loretta Young…” This narrative is characterized by a summative role (it is meant to echo and summarize all the textual fragments of the familial archive, connect the events, and provide a closing, comprehensive look on the past that the reader has encountered in all the texts that preceded it). Thus, the author recalls key events which already have been mentioned in preceding narratives, for example the fact that Janusz’s tragic fate was kept secret from their mother. The narrator recalls: “The last months of Occupation are very difficult. Mum has more grey hairs, the letters from Janusz stopped in June, she’s anxious. Tadeusz and I already know: there was a bust in Łódź, the Gestapo investigated Janusz, he’s in prison. We do not tell mum, we tell her tales about all the different situations in the underground when you have to disappear for a long while. A woman who worked with Janusz in the underground later remembered: ‘A few days before his arrest, Janusz suddenly said out of the blue – as if anticipating what was to happen – ‘Above all I’m sorry for my mother…”

The reader of Stanisław Różewicz’s text also notices that apart from echoing the events already mentioned in preceding texts, he also focuses on events and experiences from the life of his brother, the poet. It is impossible to know whether the details of the content of this text were discussed between the two brothers. I suggest that the author knew that this text would go into his brother’s published collection; thus, Tadeusz Różewicz figures largely as a hero of this reminiscence. When recalling the war years, the narrator describes a potentially dangerous situation for his older brother and his future wife, Wiesława: “suddenly – who knows how they got in – the house is teeming with military police. They turn it all upside down, search every corner, (…) Tadeusz just came back from his partisan group, there’s Wiesława too, she had to escape from Radomsko: they went to town only two hours ago. (…) Mum is calm, slightly pale. The same thought connects us, that Tadeusz and Wiesława may return at any moment with their fake papers, bad news… Before either of us speaks, mum goes outside past the gate to send them back. We’re in luck, the police have wound up and gone. Tadeusz and Wiesława return one hour later.” Why is there is no account of the speaker’s own wartime experiences given the fact that
he was only three years younger than Tadeusz Różewicz and, as such, like other youngsters, was probably mature enough to be involved in some type of conspiratorial struggle against the occupier? I would argue that putting his own biography in this case onto the back burner and showcasing his older brother is no doubt a sign of respect towards the poet and his wife. Lastly, to close the narrative, Stanisław Różewicz evokes the mother and her death. He writes: “Mum departed from us in a town that used to be called Gleiwitz, and is now Gliwice. Sometimes I think of going and seeing Lututów, the little place where mum was born in 1896, a hundred years ago. Whatever was dearest and most beautiful in our home, was Mum.” 102 These sentences conclude the whole collection and serve as a declaration of admiration and love from the other of the two remaining sons.

The intended audience of this text is the audience which eventually will be reading the complete volume titled *Mother Departs*. No doubt, Stanisław Różewicz recognized that his reminiscence is nostalgic, yet did not feel the need to account for or edit this nostalgic patina. The nature of nostalgia shows a past not as it was experienced, but as it is imagined; hence, nostalgia and memory are both less about the past than it is about the present. 103 Linda Hutcheon, after David Lowenthal, observes that the “[n]ostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects, making the past feel complete, stable, coherent, safe from ‘the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal.’” 104 We find this idyllic nostalgia in Różewicz’s volume in his own and in his brother Stanisław’s recollections of childhood, yet not in Różewicz’s recollections of adulthood. Only within the sphere of childhood is the nostalgic element truly present. One cannot say that Różewicz recalls with nostalgia anything from his adult life, which is already always marked with the “unwanted…betrayal” of history, and negative, destructive temporality. *Mother Departs*, as a complete volume, abounds in short narratives that deal with an almost mythical childhood. Parts of Stanisław Różewicz’s text also bear these characteristics. Nowhere in his text does Stanisław Różewicz delve into the details of his mother’s death, nowhere does he disclose his feelings about her debilitating illness. Time perhaps provided a buffer for these emotions and details, since most likely this undated reminiscence was composed in the late 1990s, when Tadeusz Różewicz already had a conception of his *Mother Departs*. I argue, however, that although the immediate focalizer of this text is Stanisław Różewicz, the overarching perspective is still provided by the author of the entire collection. The poet may have given his brother the last word, yet his words are coloured by nostalgia. It is Tadeusz Różewicz who discloses secrets...
and gives the overall focalization of these quasi-documents. In one of his diary entries from *Dziennik Gliwicki* (included earlier in the volume), he disclose the fact that Stanisław, probably in midst of desperation during their mother’s illness, uttered a phrase wishing her quicker death: “Staś said, ‘I wish Mother would die.’ I can’t bring myself to second his wish – the best thing one could hope for her.” The reader knows that a more complete picture of the past stems from another voice’s focalization of events, one belonging to the implied author who conceptualized the reading and potential (re)reading of these texts. We see a paradox of these multiplicity of voices presented in documentary or quasi-documentary texts as they only reinforce the prevalence and power of the voice of the authorial “I” of this collection.

3 Intertexts of documents and quasi-documents – how reliable is memory through documentary authentication?

3.1 The writer’s journal: the recording of trauma and perspective on one’s own oeuvre

In *Mother Departs*, Różewicz includes pages from his writer’s journal and pages from an agenda/pocket calendar from 1957 in which he records his mother’s death. However, the notations made in both of these sources highlight a peculiar dissonance—on one hand, the writer is consumed by his mother’s suffering, on the other, he is preoccupied with reflecting on his own creative process. Zygmunt Bauman elucidates how we perceive (and thus focalize) the death of others:

The death of others is an event in the world of objects ‘out there’, which I perceive as any other event or object. It is *my* death, and my death only, which is not an event of that ‘knowable’ world of objects. The death of others does not affect the continuity of my perception. The death of others is painful and shattering precisely because it does not do it. (…) after that death I would have to face a particular nothing, a void which the departure of the beloved other would create, a void which I do not want to perceive but which, stubbornly and to my horror, will be fully and clearly perceptible. What I cannot truly grasp is an altogether different state – a void or fullness without me to tell it as such. I am not able to experience it, and once I go through it, I shall not be around to tell the story.106
As such, what Bauman describes as a state of angst of not being able to tell the story echoes the “death drive” or the “destruction drive”, as Freud would have it, and prompts what Derrida terms the “archive fever” which incites the subject to record and preserve memory. The “destruction drive” can be conceived precisely in the two ways hinted at by Bauman, one being simply the “limit experience ‘that I am going to die’” and the other as that which lies “underneath the work of doing justice to the memory of others’ deaths or the death of the other.” In my consideration of Różewicz’s archive I draw from Derrida’s exploration of the concept of the archive in “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression”, (an essay dedicated to reading a book on the archive, to be precise, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s volume consisting of a reading of Freud’s archive). On the one hand, Derrida notes that the critic’s role is one of observing another reader reading an archive. On the other hand, Derrida does not propagate a definition of the archive in his text, but instead elaborates on what he terms “an impression” or “series of impressions about that word.

I argue that this Derridean approach to archives and their recursive (re)-readings can be helpful in reading Różewicz. First, Różewicz’s writing and his consideration of the archive is also one of exploration and meditation on the idea, rather than a position meant to arrive at its precise definitions or promote its various applications. Secondly, Derrida’s reading of another reader’s reading or (re)reading (Yerushalmi reading Freud’s archive), is an approach which echoes my reading (I am reading Różewicz’s archive, but I am also reading Różewicz’s (re)reading and construction of his own archive). I will draw some parallels between Różewicz’s rereading and construction of the archive in the present volume and Derrida’s impressions on the topic. Creating his archive from a series of impressions, series of texts, associations, and records, a method which leaves the archive open ended (open to undisclosed secrets, untold stories, omissions), Różewicz’s approach echoes Derrida’s reflections on the very nature of the archive as an idea.

Różewicz’s approach to the volume as a whole leads the reader to believe the poet is very much consciously exploring the archive as a prosthesis, with the function of not only recording but also of producing/creating the events of the past. This meaning-constructive function of the archive is what is stressed by Derrida in noting the codetermination of the archived meaning by the structure of the archives. Moreover, Derrida's description of the “spectral archive”, the trace always referring to eyes which can never be met, is precisely the “spectral” nature explored by
Różewicz when in *Mother Departs* he repeats time and time again: “Mother’s eyes rest on me” (“Oczy matki spoczywają na mnie”). It is this simultaneous presence and absence of photographic representation, memory and forgetting, the presence and absence of the “spectre” of the mother’s eyes that Różewicz explores in his text. What is more, I argue that Różewicz’s (re)reading and creation of the archive echo what in my opinion is Derrida’s key claim about the function of the archive, namely that it is not about historicization, but about the future, about “something to come.” I argue that in creating a familial archive Różewicz also focuses on that which is to come. Like Derrida, he acknowledges the unreliability and lack of clarity of the archive. Yet, in opening his archive to the public, and creating it for the public, he nonetheless wants to shape a prescribed reading of his poetic and familial origins which will speak for him when he no longer can.

Presenting the various intertexts of documents and quasi-documents in *Mother Departs*, Różewicz candidly discloses the trauma of participating in the death of a loved one, an experience which may be seen as belonging to the world of objects precisely because it does not affect one’s continuity of perceiving the world. Yet, he is an archivist and an interpreter of his mother’s passing. In returning to the documents in his personal archive, he shows that death is indeed a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain. The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just “‘there alongside.’”¹⁰⁸ I think Różewicz’s mission with *Mother Departs* is akin to what Bauman posits, an attempt to tell the story of his mother, and thus assert his familial origins while he still can, while also preserving this story of familial origins for the future. The poet’s archive suggests that in coping with trauma, language was for him both a curse (as it could not convey the experience of loss) and a refuge (as it provided a coping mechanism). Now, however, over thirty years after his mother’s death, and thirty years after recording it in his agenda and writing about it in *Dziennik Gliwicki*, he rereads and selects from that ‘archive’ to create yet another one (the present collection) no doubt, for a different purpose. However, through documentary and quasi-documentary material in *Mother Departs*, we learn that not all archives may be trusted (not all are real, some are manipulated, and most importantly they do not, in the end, shield from forgetting). Różewicz implies that a creative narrative is able to preserve experience better than any archive can. Focusing on fragments from *Gliwice diary (Dziennik Gliwicki)* and photosimiles of pages from Różewicz’s agenda, I propose that *Mother Departs* deals with the
mourning of forgetting from the perspective of the ‘now’ more than it does the mourning of the mother’s death. It mourns the forgetting of a fallible archive and attempts to create another version which, although partly fictional, coloured by memory and imagination, focalized and structured with a certain aim in mind, preserves the familial past better than documents can.

Although memory may be dependent on the texts, documents, and images of the archive, knowledge of the past constructed based on the latter needs to be questioned. As Hutcheon observes, the status of the document, once archived, changes. In the archive, the past remains as traces of events which are textualized and can thus be “buried, exhumed, deposed, contradicted, recanted”, meaning interpreted. The documentary traces of the archive cannot offer direct access to the past, but are rather a representation or replacement (through textual refiguring) of the past event. I posit that Różewicz in Mother Departs echoes postmodern fiction’s paradoxical turning to the archive and simultaneous contesting of its authority. Similarly, he also highlights the discursive nature of the representations of the past and the narrativized form in which they appear. Różewicz uses textual and iconographic documents to “authenticate” the events of the past. These include images such as a photo of a calendar page from his old agenda, reproduced on page 105 with the caption “My calendar for 1957 noting Mum’s death” (“Mój kalendarzyk na rok 1957 z notką o śmierci Mamy”); and fragments of daily logs from Dziennik Gliwicki. However, their juxtaposition implies that while the archive may preserve the record, it may also fail to convey past experience; while creative, literary narratives, although inauthentic, may achieve a more intimate representation of events of the past.

While the facsimile of the poet’s agenda page with the note about the death of his mother does not disclose anything except the objective facts of the event (the date and time of her death and of her funeral), the diary, Dziennik Gliwicki discloses the full scope of the traumatic witnessing of her death and of mourning. It demonstrates the traumatically disquieting interchangeability of descriptions of the mother’s sickness, suffering and death, set off against the poet’s description of his own simultaneous creative incapacity, inability and staleness. One such example is the entry dated 18 VI 1957: “I am at rock bottom. That’s almost funny. There are no rocks here, it would be hard to explain even to somebody close what I mean. I am at rock bottom. Used up rhetorical phrase, says nothing. And still… I know there’s no sense or value to what I’m writing. But I must not scream. […] Mother is dying day by day. They pump stranger’s blood into her.
[…] She must be afraid of death?” The lyrical subject’s own creative and existential situation at the time is repeatedly directly preceded or followed by notations of his mother’s physical suffering from cancer.

Another typical, yet equally striking example helps reiterate the continual presence of this type narrative structure in *Dziennik Gliwicki*:

> Alone in the dark. Yesterday you said: ‘It’s so hard to part from faces, you’ll want to look and look.’ My life’s come to a halt. // She’s lying down. Her belly swollen with water. Yellow hands, skin and bone. Her head aches, she wrapped it with a towel. Burning oesophagus. Burning liver. What chance do I have with a – malignant tumour? // And the writing… What to do about it? I’m a lousy writer – a hopeless observer… I don’t make any use of my few excursions into ‘real life’. (…) I can’t even write a few sentences down – and I imagine myself writing books. Managing time is the main thing. The worst thing. In fact I work from morning to night – haven’t taken ‘holidays’ for years – I should have written three times as much.¹¹⁴

Here, a distinction has to be made between undeniable trauma experienced by the lyrical subject at the time of his mother’s passing, with which he tried coping by writing in his journal, and the rereading subjectivity which returns to these journal pages from the perspective of decades in the future, who remembers the events through their textual recordings. Różewicz, as the selector of these texts, hints at this contrast of temporal distance: between being engulfed in the trauma of his mother’s passing and the later remembrance of that passing. Where the descriptions of physical suffering co-exist side by side with reflections on his creative incapacity we witness a subjectivity in trauma. Writing is a part of the daily existence of the writer, who at the time of his mother’s illness took care of her largely by himself. The texts dated to the summer of 1957 in the writer’s diary suggest that for Różewicz, his mother’s passing was clearly traumatic.

Yet rereading these passages thirty years later and selecting certain fragments for inclusion in the present volume has also a different role than simply as a testimony to past trauma. I argue that Różewicz selected these and not other fragments of *Dziennik Gliwicki* to be included in the volume to highlight issues that still have relevance for him today. I am not disputing the fact that the mother’s death, or more importantly giving homage to her life, has relevance for Różewicz today as he is nearing his own existential finitude; yet I want to highlight that these texts, documents from the archive of the writer’s journal, are not chosen haphazardly. The entries from
Dziennik Gliwicki noted above are part of a series of entries dedicated explicitly to the poet’s but are, most notably, the poet’s views on his oeuvre:

You ought to be writing one single novel or play or one volume of poems all through your life. (Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Mickiewicz did.) Writers who write stand-alone stories, novels, poems are superficial. Conrad was writing a poem, one poem, all his life; Żeromski was too. The writers here are busy little bees. They skip from one flower to the next. But it’s no good. There’s nothing they can’t do and yet it’s pointless. I was getting somewhere… Mind you, Filipowicz, the inner unity seems to be emerging there, but lately he’s distorted it.// What the ‘critical’ or ‘literary’ ‘fraternity’ labelled ‘repetition’…- “Tadeusz R. keeps repeating himself”, they said – was and possibly still is the most valuable thing in my work. The dogged reworking, repeating, returning to the same matter, and so on…to the very end. Other things will get written by somebody else. There is no alternative.115

In another lengthy entry dating to July 30th, 1957, he writes:

All the years I’ve worked in Poland I’ve never known the possibility of expressing myself: the reason being that I’m not and never have been linked to a publication. (…) Meanwhile – after the days when they treated me like rubbish (1950-1953 – my ‘generation’ particularly excelled at it, each and every mediocrity mentored me and clipped me round the ear), I was gagged and had no choice to reply. Now one of the cynics is chief editor of Nowa Kultura. I’m chucked out again; obviously I can send stuff to miscellaneous magazines, but that’s all. (…) People believe moral degenerates like Ważyk are the precursors of the Polish October. Maybe one day I’ll find the time and strength to tell the whole truth about these frauds with typewriters. It’s a gang without a structure, they support themselves, promote themselves… Obviously they all stink the same. The nauseating slurry that half drowned me for so many years – mouth, eyes, nose – it’s spilling everywhere again: all over the editorials, the unions, the publishers, the radio. ‘Regeneration’. How I survived in that muckheap, no one will ever know. (…) How much damage did they do to me? Literati, ‘moralists’, pederasts, the pimpled…116

As much as Różewicz wants to do justice to the memory of others within the present volume, he also cannot refrain from doing justice to his own past. As Marla Morris has elegantly stated, “[t]he work of citation is also the work of archiving and archiving is not unrelated to canonization.”117 Thus, Różewicz “canonizes” not only the voices of his mother, brothers and the recollections of his father’s voice, but also his own grievances and professional injuries. Leonard Lawlor, in his review of Derrida’s “Archive Fever,” rightfully observes that the fever in the archive is meant not only to safeguard information within for one person, but also to expose information to the outside for others.118 The reader of Mother Departs, thus, cannot escape a confrontation with the question: why does Różewicz ‘canonize’ and preserve these personal
complaints for the future within this familial archive? Indeed, Derrida proposes that there would be no desire for the archive without “the radical finitude, without the possibility of forgetfulness.”119 This prompts me to argue that Różewicz fears that in the wake of his successes and tributes post 1990s the years of his earlier struggles will be discounted or forgotten. For him in this regard, the archive is not about the past or the present, but about the future. Derrida concurs that the archive is not a question of the past, but “a question of the future, (...) the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”120 The poet wants his readers to remember the complete tribulations of his career; he wants full knowledge and acknowledgement of his past position as a writer. Różewicz may have been showered with honours and accolades in the late 1990s and beyond, right through to the present day, yet he is someone who refuses to discard the past. He remembers how he was treated by the literary community, the literary journals and some of his contemporaries in the 1950s and 60s; he felt discarded, misjudged, misinterpreted. And now, he wants his readers to remember that period of his career. Perhaps, he wants this awareness not only for personal but for historical reasons. For example, Różewicz rarely talked about the functioning of communism in the cultural sphere and how Polish writers contributed to it. It is my contention that in the second half of the 1990s, and also in Mother Departs, he still boldly tries to address these issues of his past. It seems that he validates honesty the most—not claims to full knowledge or totalizing views of the world and history, but fundamental honesty of one’s position. I interpret the cover of his poetic volume in English translation by Barbara Plebanek and Tony Howard, recycling (2001), where the poet appears on the cover while standing among garbage receptacles, to be a tongue-in-cheek comment to those critics who claim that Różewicz, in this period of his oeuvre, has succumbed to repeating himself. Rather than representing creative fatigue or laziness, this is a clever ploy to also once again reiterate his own comment: “I lived in this garbage” (“Ja żyłem w tym śmieciaku”). Further, I posit that Różewicz was deeply wounded by his mistreatment from the Polish literary community in those years and does not want his readers (both present and future) to forget that this, too, has been part of his experience. He is clearly still bothered by the lack of understanding and careful reading of his work, in the late 1990s. In an interview from 1999 with Mieczysław Orski for the Silesian periodical Odra, for instance, the poet noted: “I would stress one issue, and not for the first time, that inside of Poland, despite appearances, and despite a large number of reviews and academic publications, I was not very attentively read.”121 Thus, with each of
these published works, Różewicz not only returns to vital issues of the past, but also demands responsible reading from his audience and critics with “a promise (…) of a responsibility for tomorrow.”

3.2 Calendar / agenda page: a document fails to preserve memory

If Gliwice diary (Dziennik Gliwicki) records the painful physicality of Stefania Różewiczowa’s sickness and passing and the son’s textual coping with his emotions, why does the poet reproduce a photographic representation of his calendar page noting his mother’s death? Page 105 of the volume is devoted solely to the photo-simile labeled at the bottom of the page: “My calendar for 1957 noting Mum’s death” (“Mój kalendarzyk na rok 1957 z notatką o śmierci Mamy”). On this iconic representation we further read: “Monday 15th – Mum still lives”; Tuesday 16th – Mum died at 10:20 am”; Thursday 18th – Mum’s funeral at 4pm” (“Poniedziałek 15 – Mama żyje”; “Wtorek 16 – Mama umarła o godzinie 10:20 rano”; “Czwartek 18 – pogrzeb Mamy o godz.16”). Rather than an authenticating function, this document serves to draw attention to the fact that the past is accessed here through the archive. Yet it is the nature of the archival document that dictates and changes interpretation. The vastness of physical and emotional suffering both of the mother and the witness of her passing is communicated only in Różewicz’s prose entries. The page from the calendar lacks these dimensions. However, it speaks of the nature of memory and forgetting and serves as a direct contrast to the prose narrative, which Różewicz titles: “… twenty years later” (“… po dwudziestu latach”).

The calendar page shows a detailed preoccupation of memory faced with death. It is commonly known that in western culture we meticulously record the time of someone’s death to the minute, just as we record a birth. In the present (and presence) of death, this detailed attention to time seems vital. In the context of the temporality of an entire life experience, in its everyday dimension in which forgetting prevails over remembering, amidst our “innate tendency toward amnesia,” the detailed recording of the time of death seems awkward. Różewicz highlights the contradiction of turning to the archive for the preservation of memory, and simultaneously contests its power. It does not shield from forgetting, yet at the time of writing, recording such
extreme experience as death in brief matter- of- fact phrases, confirms his mother’s passing, and paradoxically, brings it to life:

(...) Now I’m in the country seventeen years later I forgot the anniversary of Your death I had a visit from a friend a theatre director we spent hours talking it was a hot day we walked through the woods to some shallow lakes the sweat dripped down my neck my back one hot July like this I threw a handful of earth on your wooden coffin a dog is running ahead of us panting (...) splashing water sun-warmed water silted with slime warmed-up covered with bulrushes the blue elongated azure lines are dragonflies over the surface of the water a crater healed and filled again I went to the cemetery this year to Your grave turned earth inside a cement frame a few withering yellowish flowers the poor gravestone fake stone (...) and you under the earth? You go deeper up here on the earth I listen to music and by means of eyes and hands my brain transfers the shape of my thoughts into letters (...) It’s been years. You’re gripping my hands my legs you pull me into the earth I denied you the Cock crows as I wake I’m kneeling by the bed but I’m not praying I’ve shut my eyes (...) July approaching the 20th anniversary of Your death. That murmur is the raindrops rain the music is the rusling – and I alive evening coming.125

The aforementioned citation serves as juxtaposition to the earlier diary entries devoted to the mother’s suffering. This time, Różewicz reads his mother’s death through a memory dimmed with temporal and emotional distance. However, contrary to the distancing effect of temporal disconnection with the initial traumatic event of mother’s death, the poet utilizes a narrative technique reminiscent of stream of consciousness. Różewicz’s narration displays the associative images arising in the narrator’s psyche: the physical sensation of sweat on his neck and back which brings to mind a hot July similar to that during which his mother was dying; seeing the muddy water in little lakes and the image of her grave. The domination of the speaker is stressed in this narrative fragment since Różewicz’s interlocutor never responds. In fact, the speaker is his own addressee, as the narrator addresses his mnemonic monologue to his deceased mother and does not grant her a voice. The concern for the reader seems to be minimal. The temporality of this citation alternates between present and past seen retrospectively. The time frame of the recalled memory is also inconsistent (three years pass from the beginning of the narrative to its closing). Such ambiguous treatment of temporality is characteristic of ‘‘memory monologues’ which are located somewhere in-between narration and interior monologue where the present moment of illocution is emptied of all contemporary, simultaneous experience: the monologist exists merely as a disembodied medium, a pure memory without clear location in time and
space.”¹²⁶ In this narrative memory “after twenty years” Różewicz, rather than mourning his mother, mourns forgetting. Once again, bringing the reader into an undefined present of “now”, via a technique of stream of consciousness stylization, the reader eavesdrops on an interior mnemonic monologue which discloses the failures of one’s memory.

Now close to facing his own mortality, the poet evokes the mythical Narcissus looking into his own reflection. The images of looking into the water of the little lakes which the subject passes on his walk through the forest are in his mind associated with the opening up of the earth to house the departed (the earth’s “cavities” that are graves). This is how the image of the mother’s modest grave enters the subject’s memory and the narrative. Looking into the earth, the subject expresses the feeling that the mother is pulling him in: “It’s been years. You’re gripping my hands my legs you pull me into the earth” (“Minęły lata Ty mnie trzymasz za ręce za nogi ty mnie ciągniesz do ziemi”). Facing his own inevitably approaching mortality, Różewicz mnemonically returns to the time of his mother’s death. He returns to his memory of that experience and to his private archives, which memorialized the official and personal details of his experience to find something disquieting at the heart of those memories. These memories also bring a lack of consolation. Is the mother a “teacher of the difficult art of farewells” (“nauczycielką trudnej sztuki pożegnania”), as Legeżyńska would like to see her? I propose that even though the lyrical subject might have wanted her to fulfill such a role, this seems only to be wishful thinking.

Memory of the mother and her gaze focused on the subject throughout the volume reinforce memory and forgetting, simultaneously. Indeed, Różewicz memorializes his own mother in the volume Mother Departs by inserting her story, her words, and photographs of her into his oeuvre. At the same time, within his stream of consciousness or interior memory monologue stylization, he confesses the encroachment of forgetting and makes himself / his subjectivity (his experience of memory) the focus of this narrative. The archive is haunted by “phantoms” and a feverish “death drive” or “death instinct” as Derrida would have it, and is thus conditioned by the notion of one’s own death or giving justice to the death of others. Yet, as the critic maintains, the meaning of the archived material is always necessarily co-determined by the structure that archives.¹²⁷ Focalization then, plays a key role in determining the meaning of the archived texts, documents, and quasi-documents in this volume.
The stylization in this narrative, of what we might call a ‘memory monologue,’ is a semi-
nostalgic confession and an example of a particular kind of focalization. Confessions can be
defined as a “personal history that seeks to communicate or express the essential nature, the
truth, of the self. (…) Confession is ontological… [while] memoir [is] historical or cultural.”
While pointing to the ‘truth’ of the self, confession, according to Mark Freeman and Susannah
Radstone, also purports to show development, “becomingness” and the temporal difference
between I then and I now. What, then, is the nature of this development between the “I” seen
across temporality in Różewicz’s confession? His lyrical subject reveals: “seventeen years later I
forgot the anniversary of Your death (…) I denied you the Cock crows as I wake I’m kneeling
by the bed but I’m not praying I’ve shut my eyes (…) July approaching the 20th anniversary of
Your death. That murmur is the raindrops rain the music is the rusling – and I alive evening
coming.” The development is the disclosure that the nature of memory is forgets. In *Mother
Departs*, we see a wavering of memory, efforts to possess it and assure its continuation, and
repeated realizations of forgetting. Alluding to the famous betrayal of Christ by Peter who denied
his master three times before the rooster crowed, Różewicz suggests that forgetting is a betrayal.
At the same time he is also a son who builds a “confession” to preserve memory. As Jeremy
Tambling points out, the eighth meaning of the word “confession” in the *Oxford English
Dictionary* is a “tomb in which a martyr or confessor is buried: the crypt, shrine in which the
relics are kept.” Characterizing his mother’s grave as “a crater healed” (“zabliźniony dół
zasypany”), Różewicz notes that his trauma related to her death has similarly closed itself like an
open wound which in time leaves only a scar. What material manifestation to her memory
remains (her tombstone) is meagre “a few withering yellowish flowers the poor gravestone fake
stone” (“pare wysychających żółtych kwiatków biedny nagrobek ze sztucznego kamienia”).
Regardless of whether or not this further contributes to the poet’s guilt that he did not remember
the anniversary of his mother’s death, Różewicz feels this guilt and tries to somehow remedy it
by confessing. The poet, however, is not only an advocate for his mother’s memory. After all, his
anti-hero in *The Card Index*, inquired: “You will leave here and forget about me. Isn’t it true?
You are forgetting already.” I posit that in *Mother Departs*, this concern for memory (his
memory) is still valid. There are two intended recipients of this confession—he himself and his
authorial audience. After all, this is a paradoxical confession voiced on the public forum of
literature. Implicitly, Różewicz’s narrator is prescribing a certain reception / reading of this
confession. He wants his reader to reflect on that which will remain after his death. Will the reader of the present text be like the Biblical Peter who will deny the knowledge of his master? What will remain from this confession twenty years after Różewicz’s death?

4 Photography and the death of a parent: Różewicz in dialogue with Barthes

4.1 Death of the camera shutter

One of the most striking of cinematic effects, although now frequently overused, is the portrayal of the moment when a camera shutter clicks to capture an image of a group of people. It is at that moment, paradoxically, that one most strongly experiences the death-like power of photography. With the short snap of a shutter, the group turns into their own past, and the passing of time is revealed with all its painful strength. This photographic moment has been staged by Tadeusz Kantor (a friend of Różewicz) who in a play entitled I shall never return (1988) grotesquely portrays this death aspect of the camera. He shows a camera hidden under a dark cloth which changes into a machine gun; the photographer then turns into an executioner while the subjects of a photograph fall to the ground, struck by the bullets. The photographic subjects and the present moment in time are thus annihilated by the shutter of the camera. That captured moment will never be repeated, despite the fact that the photo itself may be reproduced many times, and persists as a material document that one can return to. In this sense the medium of photography is reminiscent of remembrance, with the distinction that memory, in a way similar to parody, is a “repetition with a difference.” While photography is static and the negative cannot be altered, it nonetheless serves memory and facilitates its difference. Moreover, as Barthes claims, photography has a connection with the “crisis of death” which began in the second half of the twentieth century. Death has to have a place in society and when it no longer exists (or exists to a significantly lesser degree) in the widespread practice of religion, then it must be present somewhere else. Photography, contemporaneous with the disappearance of rituals, can be thought of as an entrance into our society of death that is asymbolic, non-religious, non-ritualistic; a kind of immersion into literal death.
In this section of the chapter devoted to photographs which play a key role in the narratives of *Mother Departs*, I draw on what Linda Hutcheon terms as the “study of representation.” She posits that the study of representation is “not a study of mimetic mirroring of subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past.” Różewicz’s volume, through the focus on its iconographic material, can be analyzed in terms of how it structures the portrayal of the subjects (Stefania Różewicz and Różewicz himself) in the temporalities of the past and the present. I will also show that Różewicz, to a significant extent, adopts the tactics of a memoir writer in this volume. Nancy Miller argues that in rescuing their personal history as they recapture the family past, memoir writers conceal the boundaries between self and other, autobiography and biography, doing so especially when a child embarks to tell the parent’s story. She contends that in our era of images, this “reconfiguration of a shared narrative” often enlists photographs “in order to retrieve the past that is ours but not ours alone.” Thus, in the case of *Mother Departs*, the reader asks: “Whose story is it?” As much as the memoir of a parent’s death is necessarily the story of two lives—the told and the telling—it is also the triumph of the child’s (here the poet’s) vision and version of the past.

Moreover, in my view Różewicz, similarly to Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (a photographic treatise, but also a text mourning the death of Barthes’ mother), treats photography as a medium that authenticates the past, calls upon the return of the dead, and also privileges the personal punctum over the historical studium of a photograph. Barthes in *Camera Lucida* explains that as a “spectator” he was interested in photography only for sentimental reasons, and furthermore, that he wanted to explore it not as a question, a theme, but as a wound. Like Różewicz, Barthes sifts through family photographs of his deceased mother and chooses to write a narrative about them.

Let us look at the definitions of the punctum and the studium of an image and assess why these two categories are important in a discussion of Różewicz’s text. Barthes speaks of a photograph having or lacking a punctum. When a photograph has no punctum it has the power to please or displease visually, yet it lacks the power to emotionally “prick” the viewer. Possessing only a studium, it possesses a “very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of
inconsequential taste: *I like / I don’t like.* The *studium* is in the order of *liking*, not of *loving*; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right.’”143 In searching through his mother’s photographs after her death, Barthes looked for a photo that would inspire a short text about her memory. As the critic discloses in his narrative, first he wanted to write a text for himself, and only later for an audience to ensure that his mother’s memory “will last at least the time of [his] own notoriety.”144 He tries to find, as he says, “the truth of the face I had loved.”145 In the end, he settles on a photograph that represents his mother not in her final years, not even as an adult, but as a little girl of five. The choice is explained as follows: “During her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph.”146 However, the readers will never see this photograph of Barthes’ mother as a child as he fails to include it in his book. Perhaps this very personal *punctum* which he sees in it would be lost to the reading public, and he knows it. Perhaps he does not wish to betray that most intimate of details.

What are Różewicz’s choices in terms of the photographs of his mother included in his volume? There are two main portrait photographs of the mother in *Mother Departs*. One is shown on the cover, a portrait of a young woman who is very youthful, almost girly. Yet because of its characteristic oval format, it is an image reminiscent of photographs placed on gravestones. This image reappears on page 72 of the volume, this time un-cropped, showing the arms of the seated subject, the mortuary connotation entirely absent. The photograph is signed, at the bottom of the page, “Mum in her formal outfit” (“*Mama w stroju wizytowym*”). The other main portrait of the mother appears on the opening page (fifth page) of the volume: a portrait shot of an older Stefania Różewiczowa (probably in her fifties) signed at the bottom of the page, with the phrase “Mother’s eyes rest on me” (“*Oczy matki spoczywają na mnie*”).

It is the latter image that is characterized by a Barthesian *punctum*, I would argue. The phrase “Mother’s eyes rest on me,” repeated continuously throughout Różewicz’s narrative, is associated with that particular photo. The *punctum* for Różewicz consists of his mother’s smiling eyes, which he remembers and imagines looking at him at various points in his life. The eyes he remembers are what “pricks” the poet in that photo. For Różewicz it is the older mother, whom
he remembers from the time of her final years, from her declining health, and finally from his nursing her, that has the power to resurrect her in his memory. Although for the poet, like for Barthes, the sick and dying mother whom he nurses and cares for becomes also like a child, he does not include representations of her as a little girl. The trauma of nursing the dying mother is communicated in narrative form in *Dziennik Gliwicki*, where on numerous occasions the poet despairs: “My poor sick child. (...) My poor little child. (...) When she walked away down the corridor she was like a little girl. I love Mother like my own sick little child;”¹⁴⁷ “I’m like a mindless animal that won’t stop feeding its dead cub.”¹⁴⁸ Of course, one reason for the lack of such photos may be that they do not exist in Różewicz’s private archive. The only photo in the volume which portrays Stefania Różewiczowa as a youth is an image of her in folk clothing on page 15.

Thus, Różewicz’s examination of the visual archive remaining after his mother is different from Barthes’. His *punctum* is in the familiar image of his mother’s face, the one he remembers, and which the photograph only confirms. While Barthes speaks of the resurrecting notion of photographs as “that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead”¹⁴⁹, for Różewicz this is both a terrible, haunting presence which causes anxiety, but also a pleasant presence which mediates escape from the present into a distant time of nostalgic childhood.

### 4.2 Photography’s power to authenticate the past

I have proposed that for Różewicz, similarly as for Barthes, the photographs mainly function as documents that have the power of authentication of the past. Barthes argues that there is nothing Proustian in the photograph, as it does not call up the past and does not restore for the critic that which has been eradicated by time, but rather verifies that what one sees in a photograph has indeed existed.¹⁵⁰ Thus the critic calls photography “a bizarre *medium* of (...) hallucination” which is false in terms of the perception that “it is not there” but true at the level of time, in the sense of “it has indeed been.”¹⁵¹ The photographs in Różewicz’s text play an analogous role to other iconographic documents he includes. They seem only to authenticate the past as one learns little from their own narratives. The photographs do not have much in the way of annotated text/captions and Różewicz does not say much about them in his text. The portrait photos are
official and do not tell us anything detailed about their subjects. One can perhaps account for their official nature by the time period to which they belong, since the poet captions one of the photos of his father: “Father in his formal outfit. That was how people used to pose for photographs” (“Ojciec w stroju wizytowym. Tak się pozowało do zdjęć”). From the group photographs, we learn that the children would go with their mother for walks in the forest, and that Różewicz’s mother was perhaps a modest and affectionate woman, judging by the way she is holding her son’s arm; yet she hides behind him in a photograph included on page 55. Rather than the photographic image, it is the narration itself which explores the intricacies of memories and emotions that may or may not be associated with some of the photographic representations of the past in this text.

The remaining photographs included in the volume show how Różewicz structures the portrait of himself (and his mother) as subjects. The images play an illustrative function for the narrative and are organized on a basic thematic level. These photos contain Barthes’s studium and lack the punctum, both for the potential reader and for Różewicz himself. For example, Stefania Różewiczowa’s reminiscence of her youth titled by Różewicz “The countryside of my childhood” (“Wieś mojego dzieciństwa”) is illustrated with the already mentioned photograph of her in folk clothing. The following narrative, also of her authorship, titled “Rok 1921, 9 października” (“9th of October, 1921”), which treats the birth of her poet middle son, is illustrated with both parents shown together within one frame, and signed at the bottom of the page, “Parents are going to pay a visit; I was not born yet” (“Rodzice wybierają się z wizytą, mnie jeszcze wtedy nie było na świecie”). It is clear that Różewicz here tries to present an image of a unified family unit; in a way, he is asserting his origins. Next, on the facing page of the poem “Powrót do lasu” (“Return to the forest”), appears a photograph of the poet with his mother, presumably outside their home. It is dated to 1944, a year when the youth as a Home Army soldier has returned home on leave. Subsequently, a modest section of the volume devoted to Różewicz’s father (the poems titled “Ojciec”, “Odwiedziny dziadka”, “Łódź”, “Dwie siekierki”) is preceded by two portrait photographs of the parents. Although left undated, judging by the background of the image, both presumably date to the same time period and have been taken at the same portrait studio. At this point in the narrative of the whole volume however, the reader feels a discord between the illustrations and the figure of the largely missing father, especially in the context of his presence in the life of Stefania Różewicz. There are only few
instances outside of the abovementioned poems where his presence within the family life is implied and he remains a largely illusive and mysterious figure.

As far as the relations of both parents to each other, and Stefania Różewiczowa’s role as a wife, these elements are excluded from the narratives. It is clear that this is not where Różewicz’s interest lies. He sees and presents her solely in her role as a mother. Finally, the short text authored by Różewicz’s older brother Janusz, again given a title by Różewicz himself “The road home from school. A letter fragment” (“Droga ze szkoły do domu. Fragment listu”), is preceded by two photographs: a portrait photo of Janusz Różewicz and a picture of the mother with Janusz’s girlfriend. The nature of these photographs seems to be purely illustrative, that is, to portray the characters of this narrative section. Różewicz’s narrative does not allude to them either directly or indirectly. The closing narrative by the youngest of the Różewicz brothers, Stanisław Różewicz, is accompanied by three photographs: one of the children with the mother from an excursion to the forest; the second of the family posing seated at a table; and finally, a faded and damaged portrait of the father. As the father is mentioned in Stanisław Różewicz’s narrative, this seems to be again a fitting place to include his portrait as an illustrative tool for the reader. Finally, one needs to ask, if most of the photographs in Mother Departs play an illustrative function, then why should they be regarded as important in the poet’s portrayal of himself and his mother as subjects, in his retrieval of the past that is not his own alone? Perhaps a more nuanced reading of Barthes will allow us to address this question.

Critics like W. J. Mitchell view Barthes’s Camera Lucida as a text in which the photographs achieve an “independence” and “co-equity … by constant subversion of the textual strategies that tend to incorporate photographs as ‘illustrative’ evidentiary examples.” Although Mitchell argues that at first the photographs in Barthes’s text seem to be purely illustrative, their closer examination subverts this notion, as Barthes emphasizes what he calls the “punctum”, the “nameless features … [which] open the photograph metonymically onto a contingent realm of memory and subjectivity.” In Mitchell’s view, Barthes attempts to recover the lost magic of photography, celebrating the resistance of images to language. In place of the photo of his mother as a little girl in the Winter Garden, Barthes includes a photograph by Nadar titled The Artist’s Mother (or Wife) but deliberately attaches a confused “legend” to this image. Mitchell explains that the photograph was taken by Paul Nadar, the artist’s son and it is of his mother,
Nadar’s wife. It is a portrait photo of an older woman, seated with one hand touching her mouth. Her face, surrounded by gray hair, is in striking contrast to the rest of her torso, which is almost completely dissolved in the picture’s dark background. Nadar’s mother faces the photographer with a blank, melancholy look in her dark eyes. Mitchell argues for a series of associative substitutions with Barthes’s choice of introducing this image, where Barthes’s mother becomes “The Artist’s Mother”, and then, finally, “the Mother.” Barthes contends that all the world’s photographs formed a labyrinth at the center of which he could find nothing but that picture of his mother as a little girl in the Winter Garden. He leads his readers into this labyrinth by ekphrasis, with “the thread of language.”

In Różewicz’s case, the only photograph which stands on its own and possesses “co-equity” with the narrative text, not serving an illustrative function, is the photograph of the aged Stefania Różewicz. This is the photo to which the poet attaches the *punctum* that becomes the repeated chorus in the text: “Mother’s eyes rest on me.” It is this *punctum* through which Różewicz leads the reader, like Barthes, through the thread of language, into his personal reminiscence of the mother. Różewicz’s mother is always the artist’s mother; however, she also becomes somewhat universalized as “the Mother.” The reader needs to recall the focalization of her as “*Mater Dolorosa*” in the poems which follow the mother’s narratives. There she becomes a mother of her generation, who like other mothers who have lost their sons, mourns her loss. Although other photographs in this volume serve rather an illustrative function, that is, are characterized by the *studium*, the poet nonetheless is foregrounding the personal over the universal in his narrative. By giving voice to his brothers in this text, Różewicz seems to somehow ‘nobilitize’ his mother’s memory, making her an extraordinary mother, a mother who bore and raised three artists, two poets and a filmmaker. Both Janusz, the poet murdered by Gestapo in 1944 for his involvement in the underground conspiracy of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), and Stanisław, a filmmaker who died only recently in November of 2008, are given voice in Różewicz’s volume.

Yet each of their voices serves a different purpose. As I already mentioned, Janusz’s text subtitled “The road home from school. A letter fragment”, and dated to the 25th of May 1940, is more ambiguous than Stanisław’s narrative. Janusz’s letter, marked by youthful optimism and vitality, seems to stand as a contrast to the dark fate Janusz suffered only a few years later. Różewicz seems to inscribe his brother once again in the “generation of Columbuses,” which included such
poets as Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Tadeusz Gajcy, Andrzej Trzebiński—youths who fought in WWII and whose lives and talents were cut tragically short. Therefore Janusz is and is not given a voice in this volume. His presence is characterized more as a silence and loss and is conveyed in Różewicz’s poems portraying the mother as Mater Dolorosa. In addition to the already cited poems, Różewicz also adds others in the same section of the volume, which only further reinforces the same notion of the grieving mother, here universalized as all grieving mothers. For example, in a poem entitled “Burial mound” (“Kopiec”), Różewicz writes, “Mother digs in the mound / ... // it’s him / the one you don’t rush to welcome / at the door / the one who isn’t dozing in the raspberry bushes / the one who won’t come back tomorrow // Mother buried alive / at the table / limply moves her fingers / in the air.” In “A woman in black walks on roses” (“Kobieta w czerni stąpa po róžach”), he adds “She thinks of the sons who left / her in rough uniforms...” No doubt referring to the loss of the eldest brother, Różewicz is inscribing his mother in the generation of women who lost their children / sons in the war.

The voice and narrative of the other brother, Stanisław Różewicz, is meant to hint at Janusz’s potential as a literatus—he was the brother most highly esteemed by their polonist professor. Yet, it is important to note that there are no poems by Janusz included in this volume, although Różewicz made sure that his poetry got published. It seems as if there was only room for one poet in this volume—Różewicz himself. Stanisław recalls, “we are good at the ‘arts’; well all three of us hopeless at math... But mum always comes back smiling from parents’ evenings. The form tutor Mr Przyłubski who teaches Polish, always praises Janusz for his essays and for making speeches at all the official school occasions. Mum’s happy when Janusz gets his first things published...” Stanisław’s reminiscences revolving around the figure of the mother are summed up in the line closing the narrative: “Whatever was dearest and most beautiful in our home, was Mum.” It seems that it is the mother who was a vital part of the brothers’ childhood; she was the one who allowed for all the “firsts,” for all the initiations, that is, into the world of learning, nature, and the arts.

While Janusz’s narrative omits the figure of the mother, and Stanisław’s text consists of solely positive, almost blissful memories, Różewicz himself presents a much more complex relationship to her, one which includes unfulfilled obligations, irritations and regrets. This is where the punctum photograph enters once again, as the poet emphasizes the connection between
himself and the mother—“Mother’s eyes rest on me”—as the essential key to this multi-voiced silvic narrative. The other photographs of the volume authenticate the past and serve as images for public consumption as illustrations of a family album presented so they could at least live on in public memory as long as Różewicz’s own notoriety. Only one photograph of the aged mother stands to uncover the deeply private recollections and perturbations of Różewicz’s memory that are vital for him as he nears the end of his own life. Różewicz emerges, then, as the focalizer of narratives and voices. He allocates some of the voices in the background privileged positions as necessary parts of the familial portrait. He chooses to bring to light his own “I” in dealing with his mother’s memory, that is, on a more complex and deeper level than an homage or straightforward reminiscence (as I would characterize the case of Stanisław Różewicz’s narration). Thus, the photographs in Mother Departs point to the fact that Różewicz’s “I” does not disappear, nor is fragmented, as Borkowska would have it, but rather portrays itself within the flexible boundaries between self and Other and autobiography and biography of the parent. Różewicz does so in the role of a memoir writer largely focused on and concerned with his own self vis-à-vis another subjectivity defining his life.

4.3 Conversing with the photograph: reading the punctum

Whereas Barthes longed to find in his mother’s photograph “the truth of the face [he] had loved,”¹⁶³ Różewicz looks to his mother’s eyes watching him in order to decipher his own unresolved internal and psychic conflicts, unrealized conversations, unfulfilled responsibilities, but also to reflect on the past, on memory and forgetting. He is a poet who does not believe in closures, as he proclaims in his 1962-3 poem “Larva” (“Larwa”): “I dead / so busy / I write constantly / yet I know that one departs / always / with a fragment / with a fragment / of the whole…”¹⁶⁴; yet he cannot resist revisiting the past and attempting closures and atonements which cannot be fully attained. Mother Departs is about unrealized conversations, regretful acts, and the fallible memory that constitute an individual’s life. It is also an homage to the simplicity of the mother’s nature that houses the secret of goodness and wisdom in understanding of the world, far beyond any other attained by intellectual pursuits. In a conversation with Robert Jarocki in 1999, Różewicz disclosed that he regrets many conversations with such people as
Leopold Staff or Jadwiga Witkiewiczowa (the widow of the famous Polish writer and painter, Stanisław Witkiewicz), which he always thought of and wanted to have, but left uninitiated until it was too late, because his prospective interlocutor had died. In the interview, the poet says:

I lost a lot due to failure of execution. (...) for a few years after the war (...) I lived in a literati house on Krupnicza street in Kraków, under the same roof as Mrs Jadwiga, Witkacy’s widow. We met nearly every day on the stairs (...) I thought: tomorrow I have to propose a conversation, ask her for an interview, after all this is an extraordinary opportunity. (...) yet somehow I did not overcome this. And the chance has passed. She left for Warsaw, I went to Gliwice. // It was a similar situation with kindly predisposed towards me Leopold Staff. There too, I promised myself deeper conversations, some kind of longer candid interview. I was walking around with this plan until he died…

Mother Departs is also about one of those unfulfilled conversations between the mother and son. In the short narrative “The resit” (“Do poprawki”) included in the volume the poet writes: “Now as I write these words, Mother’s eyes are on me. In her eyes there is a question she never asked.” Naturally, Różewicz does not disclose this question, but apart from this undisclosed secret, the notion of things left unsaid is made apparent by this fragment. Questions which lack resolution and relationships which lack closure can bring on a sense of outstanding responsibility both to the person who has passed on and to oneself. Closure can be sought in literature if one is a writer. Paul Auster, in his memoir The Invention of Solitude (1982), claimed a sense of literary obligation as a reaction to the loss of a parent. He maintained, “I thought: my father is gone. If I do not act quickly, his entire life will vanish along with him.” In my view, Różewicz is also responding to a similar literary obligation to the memory of his mother, yet his aim is to also fulfill another purpose with his narrative—to create a biographical story of his own familial past.

Moreover, Różewicz is also working through the disappointing nature of memory. In 1964, seven years after his mother’s death, in the volume The Face (Twarz) the poet writes: “Assisi a nest / on a cracked rock / a bird’s white / egg // I carried / this rosying / landscape / towards my city // I never succeeded // on the third day / your smile / deteriorated / I returned you to the earth // here flows the river / of forgetting / over the eyed the mouth / over your feet / shod in paper / slippers.” Assisi, as one of the symbolic cities of Christianity, the birthplace of St. Francis and a frequent destination of religious trips/pilgrimages, may have been a place that Różewicz’s religious mother wanted to visit. Yet, the landscape of the Italian city which the lyrical subject
wanted to preserve in his memory and carry home with him to tell someone about, proved to be illusive. Similarly, the memory of the face of a loved one is also subject to analogous disappearance. Things which remain in memory and are not easily forgotten, however, are the regrets of the shortcomings of our character or behaviour. Różewicz’s lyrical subject recalls one such situation in great detail in an untitled poem included in *Mother Departs*:

I shouted at Her / ten years ago // she departed / in slippers made of black / shiny paper // ‘don’t try to explain’ / she said / ‘no need’ // I shouted at Her / in an empty / hospital corridor // it was July the heatwave / oil paint peeling / off the walls // the scent of linden trees / in a city park covered / in soot // I godless / wanted to cry her a meadow / when as she was dying / gasping she pushed back at / the empty and frightened beyond // for a blink of an eye she returned / to herself and her village / in the last hour / I wanted to beg for her / a tree / a cloud a bird // I see her tiny feet / in large paper / coffin slippers // sitting between / the table and the coffin / godless I wished for a miracle / in a gasping industrial city / in the second half / of the 20th century // this thing’s crying / dragged from me / into the light. 169

Although failable memory may dissolve the particulars of a landscape, the features of a loved face, it seems to preserve the details of our failures, shortcomings, and regrets after we have hurt our loved ones. The narrator remembers the setting of this regretful situation up to the most minute details: he screamed at his mother in an empty hospital corridor; the oil paint was peeling from the walls; it was a hot July; he remembers the scent of blooming linden trees in a local park. The poet (one who creates a textual reality from words) wanted to fulfill a wish, to create a soothing reality for the dying mother who once more wanted to see a meadow, a bird, but is powerless. He desperately wanted a miracle, for her and for himself. He has been carrying this failure and regret for many years; now, unearthing it and writing about it is the confession which he needs to make before his own death.

Yet, apart from probing painful memories and the shortcomings of memory, Różewicz also wants to celebrate his mother. Annie Ernaux in *A Woman’s Story* (1991), a book about the decline and death of her mother, wrote that with her death, “the last bond between [her] and the world [she] came from has been severed.”170 With the volume *Mother Departs*, Różewicz longs to return in reminiscence to that central person of his life, his mother, and reclaim his origins. The poet suggests that he came from her and thus that this humble and in many ways simple woman is a part of his life and experience. Różewicz’s famous poem entitled: “A story about old
women” (“Opowiadanie o starych kobietach”) illustrates his perception on the wisdom attributed to old women. Perhaps the poet’s mother can be counted among them:

I like old women / ugly women / evil women // they are the salt of the earth// [...] old women rise at dawn / buy meat fruit bread / clean cook / stand in the street / arms folded silent // old women / are immortal // Hamlet rages in the net / Faust's role is comic and base / Raskolnikov strikes with his axe // a god dies / old women get up as usual / at dawn they / buy fish bread and wine / civilization dies / old women get up at dawn / open windows / remove the filth / a man dies / old women wash the corpse / bury the dead / plant flowers / on graves // [...] they believe in life everlasting / they are the salt of the earth / the bark of trees / and the humble eyes of beasts // cowardice and heroism / greatness and pettiness / they perceive in true perspective / scaled to demands / of common day/ their sons discover America / perish at Thermopylae / die on the cross / conquer cosmos // old women go out at dawn / to buy milk bread meat / they season the soup / they open the windows / only fools laugh / at old women [...] for these are beautiful women / good women / old women / they are the embryo / mystery devoid of mystery / the sphere which rolls // old women are mummies / od sacred cats // they are tiny / shrivelled / drying / springs of fruit / or plump / oval Buddhas// when they die / a tear / flows from the eye / and joins / the smile / on a young girl’s lips.171

The grotesque elements of another of Róžewicz’s old women, the main heroine from The Old Women Broods (“Stara kobieta wysiaduje”) (1968) are largely absent from the attributes of the old women in the abovementioned poem. However, a similar motif of women embodying the maternal role is present in both instances. In the play, the old woman wants to give birth and repeatedly addresses the waiter as “son.” She emphasizes that she is the undying protectress to her child: “He has issued from me / he has gone away into the world / but I have not bitten through / the umbilical cord / I have not allowed / him to be cut off [...] I will pull him inside myself / I will push him inside / I will lock him up / when the need comes”.172 The feminine in “Story about old women” is associated with a life-giving, regenerative force of cyclical eternal return; the masculine counterpart is located in the linear and exhaustive timeline of history. While the masculine creates and explores on the plane of culture, the feminine takes care of the everyday, mundane, yet essential sphere of life. From the narratives of Mother Departs, we gather a similar role for the mother. She is the caretaker, the one who takes care of and resides in the mundane everyday reality of the home and the village while being a supportive force in the lives of her three artistically-inclined sons. The paradox is, however, that in both instances, of the play and the poem, the existence of the old women is not threatened. The Old Woman Broods ends with the heroine frantically searching for her missing son in a garbage heap and finally in a
hole in the earth—she prevails although her son has gone missing. In the poem, the old women are said to be “indestructible” (“niezniszczalne”) and “eternal” (“nieśmiertelne”). Both works, written years after the passing of Różewicz’s mother, in my reading also give tribute to the unassuming yet wise feminine figure of the universal mother.

Różewicz’s volume *Mother Departs*, can be seen within other Western narratives of a parent’s death, such as, for example, Philip Roth’s *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991), Simone de Beauvoir’s *A Very Easy Death* (1964), Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1973-1991), Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* (1980) or even Nancy K. Miller’s *Bequest and Betrayal* (1996), in which “the parent’s death seems to authorize—or at least provide a cover story—for a writer’s autobiography.”173 “The death of parents—dreaded or wished for—is a trauma that causes an invisible tear in our self-identity. In the aftermath of a parent’s death, which forces the acknowledgement of our shared mortality, loss and mourning take complex paths, since our earliest acts of identity are intimately bound up with our relation to the dead parent. But the closure produced by the end of their plot does not signal the end of ours.”174 Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* and Różewicz’s *Dziennik Gliwicki* are both narratives written at the time when sons were taking care of their dying parent. Perhaps it is inevitable that for a writer, language is a tool of coping with loss. Both writers stress what are perhaps the ever-present characteristics of narratives devoted to the parent’s passing: the imperative to not forget in order to give testimony to their life, and the idea that their conscience is under the command of the deceased parent. *Patrimony* ends with a dream: “In the morning I realized that he had been alluding to this book, which, in keeping with the unseemliness of my profession, I had been writing all the while he was ill and dying. The dream was telling me that, if not in my books or in my life, at least in my dreams I would live perennially as his little son, with the conscience of a little son, just as he would remain alive there not only as my father but as the father, sitting in judgment on whatever I do. // You must not forget anything.”175 Similarly, in Różewicz’s volume, the mother’s watchful eyes both guard and watch in judgment. As with the age of photography, which as Barthes suggested, corresponds to the “explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private,”176 Różewicz chooses to risk private secrets, dealing with his intimate conflicts and attempts at closure for the benefit of his mother’s presence in the sphere of public and textual memory. *Mother Departs*, as a volume which is as much about the mother as about the son, echoes yet another question, this time from
a narrative of Nancy Miller’s, who asks, when imagining the end of her own life: “Who would
clean up after me? Who would be like a mother to me?”177 After all, the refrain of the volume is:
“Mother’s eyes rest on me.” Różewicz is the hero and the focus of this text. As the circle of
departed loved ones expands, this is also an underlying question of Różewicz’s narrative. He
however is equally concerned with memory and seems to be asking: “Who will remember me?
Who will remember what was central to me and my life, and who will read my work, carefully
and with understanding after I pass on?”

NOTES

1 I preserve the lack of capitalization of this title (it was published without capitalization in the original
Polish; most translators also preserve this spelling). Please note that all Polish original citations appear in italics in
the notes. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

2 See Andrzej Skrendo. Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury. Poetyka i etyka transgresji (Kraków:
Univesitas, 2002).

3 See Ryszard Nycz. Sylwy współczesne (Kraków: Universitas, 1996).

4 I use the term focalizer in accordance with how Mieke Bal first introduced the term to narratology, with
reference to a narrator who “sees.” Bal bases her term on Genette’s famous distinction between one “who speaks”
(the narrator) and one who “sees”. See A Companion to Narrative Theory, eds. James Phelan and Peter J.


6 Ibid., 54.

7 Borkowska illustrates the idea of “silent speaking”, and seeing rather than speaking with the following
citation from the Mother Departs volume: “przeszedłem piechotą krajinę poezji widzialem ją okiem ryby kreta
dziecka mężczyzny i starca” (I have walked on foot through the country of poetry I saw it with an eye of a fish a
mole a child a man an old man), Mother Departs, 7.

(wielkich) narracji. Kolekcje, obiektę, symulakra... , eds. Hanna Gosk and Andrzej Zieniewicz. Warszawa: Elipsa,

9 Borkowska, 201. “Dla dziecka oczy matki są zwierciadłem, w którym odbija się jego postać, w nich
dokonuje się ciągłe potwierdzenie rozproszonej tożsamości i zagrożonego istnienia.”

10 Kathleen Woodward, Aging and its Discontents. Freud and Other Fictions (Bloomington and

11 Woodward: 67.


14 Czapliński, “Klucze do sylwy.”

15 Ibid.


19 Ibid., 38.


22 Stanisław Gębala. “Oczy Matki i suche oczy poety.” *Twórczość* 2000, nr. 4 : 100. “I co mamy zrobić z tym kolejnym źródłem o niepodważalnej wiarygodności, a w dodatku nie dającym się ‘literacko’ interpretować.”

23 Andrzej Skrendno, *Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury. Poetyka i etyka transgresji*, 149.


25 Różewicz, *Mother Departs*, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 44. “She’s turned her face to the wall // oh but she loves me / why has she turned away from me // and so with one twist of the head // you can turn your eyes from the world...” I am adjusting Bogoczek’s translation of the last phrase in my text to be closer to Różewicz’s original: “Odwróciła twarz do ściany // przecież mnie kocha / dlaczego odwróciła się ode mnie // więc takim ruchem głowy można odwrócić się od świata...” Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*, 45.

26 Skrendo, 142.


35 Cited in Majchrowski, Introduction to Kwarteka: Kwarteka Rozrzucona, 6. “Stoję pod ścianą. Bracia moi, moje pokolenie! Do was mówię. Nie mogą nas zrozumieć młodzi i starzy!”


38 Tadeusz Różewicz, Plaskorzeźba, 81. “czytam Twoją książkę / próbuję sobie przypomnieć / na czym skończyła się / nasza rozmowa”


40 Ibid., 72, 85.

41 Ibid., 85.


44 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 3-4. Tadeusz Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 7-8. „Wiesz, Mamo, tylko Tobie mogę to powiedzieć na stare lata, mogę to powiedzieć, bo jestem już starszy od Ciebie... nie śmiałem Ci tego powiedzieć, za życia... jestem Poetą. Bałem się tego słowa nigdy go nie powiedziałem Ojcu... nie wiedziałem czy się godzi coś takiego mówić. // Wchodziłem w świat poezji jak w światło a teraz szykuję się do wyjścia, w cienność... Oczywiście, Matka wie. [...]’ wien Synku mówi Matka ’zawsze to wiedziałam’ ’mów wyraźniej’ nic nie słyszę mówi Ojciec...”

45 James Olney, Metaphors of the Self, cited in Marek Zaleski, 36.


48 Ibid., 30. „nauczyciel[k]a trudnej sztuki pożegnania”

49 “Poetics of repetition” (“poetyka powtórzeń”) is a term coined by Andrzej Skrendo in *Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury. Poetyka i etyka transgresji* (Kraków: Univesitas, 2002).


52 One needs to remember here Różewicz’s poetic “manifest” in a poem titled *Ocalony (Survivor)* from his debut, *Niepokój* (1947).


57 Różewicz, *Proza II* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1990), 580. „Moją największą winą, której się nie mogę zaprzeć, jest sam fakt pisania.”


60 Różewicz, *Mother Departs*, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 7. Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*, 11-12. “’zostawię was...jesteście niegrzeczni... pójdę sobie i nigdy nie wróczę’ (...) znalazłem się w pustce i ciemności (...) i pamiętam do dnia dzisiejszego moją rozpaczę i płacz. (...) ale mama nie odeszła była z nami i będzie... teraz kiedy piszę te słowa badawcze oczy matki patrzą na mnie.”


Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle.

Caruth, “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, Survival,” 51.


Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 6. Tadeusz Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 10. „Po końcu świata / po śmierci / znalazłem się w środku życia / stwarzałem siebie / budowałem życie (...) nóż służy do krajania chleba / chlebem karmią się ludzie / człowieka trzeba kochać (...) co trzeba kochać / odpowiadam człowieka.”


Ryszard Nycz, Syby wspólczesne, 161. Nycz argues that this concept of “interior theatre” (teatr wewnętrzny), which Różewicz proposes in the last part of Przyrost naturalny, is a means of overcoming an opposition between the subject and object: “Biografia przedmiotu (utworu), jak i biografia podmiotu twórczego stają się na tej płaszczyźnie przesłankami rozważań prowadzących do koncepcji innego sposobu pisania: wypowiedzi jako bio-grafii, rodzajce się w efekcie szczególnego tekstualnego ’spektaklu’(...) [where] podmiot (...) sam staje się aktorem i autorem czy raczej aranżerem.”


78 Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 38.


82 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 40. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 41. „(...) Usta otwarte jak rana / i ręce ręce w kądanach / i matki będą płakały / nad umiłowym ciałem // Ręce matczyne są słabe / od męki drżące i trwogi / niech słowo stanie się ciałem / a jasność niech stanie się Bogiem // Toć nasi synowie też byli / Jak Twój słabiutki małenki / dla Niego dla synka twojego / i naszych osłoń od męki (...).”


84 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 42. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 43. „na stole fotografia chłopca / jasny i sztywny w czarnym kepi...// Przez pokój idzie biedna matka / poprawia fotografię płacze // Gasną na stole złote słońca / i martwy owoc jej żywota.”

85 See for example Adam Mickiewicz’s 1830 poem titled “Do Matki Polki.”

86 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 75. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 76. “potem młodzieść wspomina / wieś rodzinna / różne kraje / o tym że był w Petersburgu / na Syberii w jurtach żył / z Kirgizami kumys pił / że miał zostać organistą / o duchach pannach mężatkach / o księżach gospodyniach / co pulchne i białe jak gołąbki / same leciały do gąbki.”


87 Jan Chryzostom Pasek (approx.1636-1701) was a Polish nobleman, a soldier in the Polish military and a diarist. Towards the end of this life, he wrote Pamiętniki (Diaries) in which he described the everyday life of the gentry and his military conquests. He utilized common, everyday language and occasional profanities.

88 A chief example of “Gawęda szlachecka” in Polish letters is Pamiętki Soplicy by Henryk Rzewuski (1839). It also holds a prominent place in Adam Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz (1834), a work to which Różewicz likes to repeatedly return in his reading.

89 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 74-75. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 76-77. “nie trzeba moja duszko / nie jestem gładny” ; “jakoś tę taczkę żywota / powolutku człowiek pcha” or “dziadek mówi / ‘koń ma cztery nogi’ / potem mówi / ‘cztery kąty a piec piąty’ / po piątym piosenkę / dziadek zaczyna / ’o tym gospodarzu / co nie ma chałupy...”

89 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 74-75. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 76-77. “nie trzeba moja duszko / nie jestem gładny” ; “jakoś tę taczkę żywota / powolutku człowiek pcha” or “dziadek mówi / ‘koń ma cztery nogi’ / potem mówi / ‘cztery kąty a piec piąty’ / po piątym piosenkę / dziadek zaczyna / ’o tym gospodarzu / co nie ma chałupy...”

89 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 74-75. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 76-77. “nie trzeba moja duszko / nie jestem gładny” ; “jakoś tę taczkę żywota / powolutku człowiek pcha” or “dziadek mówi / ‘koń ma cztery nogi’ / potem mówi / ‘cztery kąty a piec piąty’ / po piątym piosenkę / dziadek zaczyna / ’o tym gospodarzu / co nie ma chałupy...”


91 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 77-78. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 78-79. “Nie placz / przecież go nie kochałeś / on jest przedmiotem / który trzeba wynieć z domu / dyskretne uchylone okna / w podświetle / bez wiosel / opuszcza ten świat / odpływa / ojciec // drewniana trumna / utonęła w kwiatach / zielonych kwiatów...”

92 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 119. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 120. “[...] Dzień rozpoczęły białe konwalie... To znaczy, że dziś mam imieniny. Bo to już konwalie w ten dzień od lat rankiem znajduje na kolдрce. Czasem jaśmin. Ale w tym roku jaśmin jeszcze nie kwitnie... Siedzę teraz przy swoim stole i myślę o sobie. Raz do roku mam chyba prawo poświęcić godzinę rozmyślań tak ważnej osobie, jaką jest pan Janusz Różewicz. ...”

93 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 128. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 128. “W dniu imienin Janusza od lat po przebudzeniu znajduje na kolдрcie konwalie, a czasem jaśmin: to mama...”

94 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 120. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 121. “Pierwszy i najmilski (a może ostatni?) tydzień nauki...”

95 Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 120-123. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 120-121. “(...) ostatnia lekcja – szybko wysukuje się z ciemnego korytarza – nawet teczka nie jest ciężka... buty stukają po szarych cementowych kwadratach trotuaru... rwący potok granatowych czapek i mundurków beretów i czarnych fartuszków (...) jest strasznie lekko i nie idę a idę mi się... teraz mój cień skacze po płótnie – takie sobie projekcje...”


Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 136. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 134. “Mama odeszła od nas w mieście, które nazywało się kiedyś Gleiwitz, a teraz Gliwice. Czasem myślę, aby pojechać i zobaczyć Lututów, niewielką miejscowości, gdzie mama przyszła na świat w roku 1896, sto lat temu. To, co w naszym domu było najdroższe i najpiękniejsze, to Mama.”


Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 104. Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 106. “Stasiu powiedział: ‘Chciałbym, żeby matka umarła.’ Then, the poet distances himself from his brother’s utterance: „Nie mogę się zdobyć, żeby za nim powtórzyć to życzenie – najlepsze jakie może być dla niej.”

Bauman, 3.


Hutcheon, 80.


Ibid.,27.


Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 105.


“(...) Teraz jesteś na wsi minęło siedemnaście lat nie pamiętam o rocznicy Twojej śmierci przyjechał mój znajomy reżyser przegadaliśmy kilka godzin dzień był upalny doszliśmy ścieżkami leśnymi nad płytke jeziorka pot spływał mi po szyi po grzbiecie w taki upalny lipiec rzuciłem garść ziemi na swoją drewnianą trumnę pies biegł przed nami dyszy (...) pluska woda wygrzana woda zamulona szlamem i roślinnością wygrzana zarośnięta siwą kruszcową podłużne kręgielnie lazurowe w powietrzu to skłarki nad lustrem wody zafariowana dół zasypany był w tym roku na cmentarzu na Twój grobie w ramie cementowej skruszona ziemia parzy była na Twoim grobie przyjechał mój znajomy musiałem podziwiać Kruczą lato 20. rocznica Twojej śmierci. Ten szelest to krople deszczu deszcz w tym szumie – i ja żyjący idzie wieczór”


Różewicz, Matka odchodzi, 110-111.


Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, 25.

Ibid., 156.


Ibid., 51.

Ibid., 51.

Ibid., 27.

Ibid., 83.

Ibid., 83.

Ibid., 85.


Ibid., 82.

Ibid., 85.

Ibid., 73.


Mitchell, 303.

Ibid., 306.

Ibid., 305.


Tadeusz Różewicz, Twarz, 32-33. "ja marty / tak bardzo zasępi piętro / aż się zasęp / zawsze / z fragmentem / z fragmentem / całość..."

"Życie w starych i nowych dekoracjach. Z Tadeuszem Różewiczem rozmawia Robert Jarocki."

"Przyjeżdżałem do miasta a miasto coraz bardziej przyjeżdżałem. (...) pojawił się koniec (...) no, myślę, że teraz mogę odpocząć. (...) ale ja nie przestaje, nie przestaje, nie przestaje, nie przestaje, nie przestaje..."

Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 118. Różewicz, Mother Departs, 117. "Teraz kiedy piętro to słowa czy Matki spoczywają na mnie. Jest w tych oczach pytanie, którego nigdy mi nie zadała"

Nancy K. Miller, Bequest and ... , x.

Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 56. Różewicz, Matka Ochodzi, 57. This poem is included in the volume without a date; it has been published before, in the volume Twarz. (Czytelnik, 1964). Mother Departs also includes a poem titled "Drzwi" (Door), also previously published in the volume Twarz. "Asyż gnaizo / na spękanej skalę / biały ptaszek / jest / niespodzianka..."

Różewicz, Mother Departs, trans. Barbara Bogoczek, 63-64. Różewicz, Matka ochodzi, 64-65. "krzyknąłem na Nię / przed dżiędzięcą laty / odeszła / w pantoflach z czarnego / błyszczącego papieru / "nie tłumaczą / nie powiedziała... / nie trzeba..." / krzyknąłem na Nię... / był lipiec upał / łuszczyła się farba olejna / na ścianach / pacman i lipy..."

Cited in Nancy K. Miller, Bequest..., 60.


175 Cited in Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and …*, 38.

176 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 98.

177 Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and ….*, 27. Miller reflects on her own passing, after she cleans up from an episode of loss of bowel control on the part of her father. Różewicz presents a similar scene in his narrative.
Chapter 3

The “Kup kota w worku (work in progress)” critique of popular culture as rereading and re-writing: authorial strategies and readerly praxis

1 Challenging the reader or reading against the text

1.1 Reckless rhetoric of popular culture versus “eraser of words"

Tadeusz Różewicz is a writer who has situated himself vis-à-vis popular culture his whole life. A poet, in Różewicz’s esteem, is an observer of everyday life who uses everyday language, whose objectives lie beyond creating a formal aesthetic of beauty. Różewicz may be described as a poet who “draws from the dirty river of life”[1] in order to probe reality the way he sees it, without aestheticizing it for palatable or pleasurable consumption. He has repeatedly asserted that he foresaw and addressed in the 1960s the changes in contemporary culture and aesthetics which were later labelled as postmodernism, at a time when no one yet had been writing about the phenomenon. He was ahead of his time; so now, as these trends are being widely recognized by Polish culture, he wants to be acknowledged for his intuition and precursory role in articulating these ideas. Yet, are Różewicz’s most recent works, dating to the late 1990s and the 2000s, in any way different from the poet’s preoccupations with popular and mass culture of his earlier oeuvre? His Kup kota w worku: work in progress (2008), a multi-genre volume, serves as a case in point in thinking through this question, as it showcases, on the one hand, the poet’s fascination, need and engagement with popular culture, and on the other hand, his arguments and battles with as well as repulsion towards it.

When the reader opens the cover of this volume and reads the initial pages, we immediately wonder: where in this text is the familiar Różewicz, the self-proclaimed “eraser of words” (skreślac słów)? I propose that when reading Kup kota w worku, one should keep in mind the idea of slowing down in order to re-read and re-write. The volume opens with the maddening, galvanizing speed typical of popular culture rhetoric. Yet the poet also sets up roadblocks for his
reader, asking us to pause, return, re-read, and re-evaluate facts and events that we typically take at face value.

In this chapter, I will explore Różewicz as a reader and re-reader of texts (authored both by others and by himself) to show that the poet, being a compulsive erudite and an utmost probing reader creates an implied reader and authorial audience of his work that is devoted to his/her search for secrets and can engage with a text that opposes linear reading and understanding. I argue that Różewicz in Kup Kota w worku stages a lesson in rereading, in a way that is undoubtedly a clever marketing ploy, but which also unveils an ethical project characterized by continuity rather than fragmentariness, constancy rather than changeability, and readerly engagement in investigating problems rather than surface reading amounting to a chase of successive new commercial sound-bites. This ethical project is in part a response to Różewicz’s fears of remaining officially unacknowledged, misunderstood, and misread. I argue that the key to reading and understanding the poet’s post-1989 oeuvre lies in his quest for an official recognition of his work and position within the Polish and world literary canon. As he prepares to exit the literary stage, prompted by a sense of an existential urgency that time is running out, he demands an engaged, axiologically sound model of reading, which will ensure an understanding of his entire oeuvre, acknowledge his precursory position, and assert his legacy.

1.2 The construction of the volume

Let us turn to the construction and contents of Różewicz’s volume to start. Kup Kota w worku (a work in progress) is a hybrid collection of prose, satiric sketches, poetry, and of the author’s drawings. As an opening Różewicz presents a section entitled “In place of a Preface” (“Zamiast wstępu”) and in it a satiric poem “She has come and passed: a model to imitate” (“wyszła i przeszła wzór do naśladowania”). This is a largely nonsensical text based on a game of linguistic and cultural associations. In it, a hero lies in bed (echoing the hero of Różewicz’s debut play, The Card Index of 1960), who reappears in the rewritten version, Card Inex Scattered in 1992); from a peculiar anti-hero who has been refusing to act and get out of bed, he has now become an old Santa Claus, and he observes various female characters coming into and leaving his room. Thus,
the opening seems to be the author’s first nod to the reader, as if to say, “See, remember The Card Index.” There, people from the street were passing through the room of the antihero; here we have two protagonists (heroes or maybe an anti-heroes), one 30 years old lying in bed; the other a 70 year old grandpa, seated on a wheelchair. The interplay between them, between reminiscene and simultaneous unwillingness to remember the past, and the present of the new realities is what makes these characters captivating. Różewicz is not only alluding to, but also rewriting, a scene from his most famous play, implicitly asking the reader to return to it as well, be it in memory, or via its actual text. A prose section entitled “push, girl, push” (“przyj dziewczę przyj”), lamenting the state of contemporary Polish language and parodying the voice of young female literati, bloggers, and media personalities, follows for a number of pages. This is interspersed with humorous pen drawings by the author.

Next, Różewicz includes a parody of a short story by his friend and contemporary, the already deceased Polish writer Kornel Filipowicz; and a short note written to him by the poet, allegedly from 1970. Noteworthy also are a number of other parodic texts tackling the new trends in drama, such as “New dramaturgy: creative interpretations” (“Nowa dramaturgia: twórcze interpretacje”); a humorous reflection on the social nuances of Różewicz’s visits to health spas titled “questions” (“pytania”); a parody of newspaper advice columns “What’s the snag” (“Gdzie jest pies pogrzebany”) and of popular TV ads (“Kluski”); a comment on the questionable value of literary nominations (“Zabiegana i nominowany”); as well as a myriad other “afflictions” of everyday life. Finally, the parody ends and the reader encounters the Różewicz we come to expect (humorous, at times deeply sarcastic and sneering, yet serious in tone) as he tackles issues of historical and personal memory, and addresses the question of his own poetry and its role in the contemporary cultural praxis of reading. The fragmentary structure of this volume presents a challenge to the reader. With its cascading currents of popular culture parodies and countless intertexts, the volume opens to baffle and annoy the reader, only to reward us with a subtle confession of vulnerability in its closing. I argue that by staging a performance of reading and rereading a variety of texts, Różewicz attempts to teach us how to re-read effectively and read ethically.
2 The title: ‘Buy a pig in a poke’

2.1 Allusions to Staff and unsettling reader’s expectations

Let us deal with the title of the volume first in order to grasp the full creative strategy behind this publication. There is the suggestion of trickery in the title, in “kup kota w worku” – “buy a cat in a sack, (please)”, which translates, less literally, as a plea to buy “a pig in a poke,” as the rough equivalent idiomatic expression in English would be, involving an appeal to purchase something that remains hidden from view. As the title of the volume, it implies that a buyer of this book might be silly enough not to check the status of what they have bargained for; the trickster Różewicz hints that we, the readers, may encounter a surprise once we open the cover, perhaps getting more than we bargained for. Perhaps the author wants to unsettle the expectation of a certain mode of “reading Różewicz.” There are two elements in the title: first, the imperative “kup kota w worku,” followed by the English phrase “work in progress”; together they comprise what I call a strategy of relevance and vulnerability. “Kup kota w worku,” apart from hinting at the possible naiveté, carelessness, or maybe even arrogance of a buyer, who is so confident of his purchase as not to examine the contents, the phrase “kup kota w worku” also alludes to the last work by Leopold Staff, the “old poet,” whom Różewicz admired and befriended at the beginning of his poetic career. In Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego (1971), Różewicz remembers the elderly Staff and describes his last meeting with him as well as the painful encounter with his family members very shortly after Staff’s death. Różewicz recalls his last conversation with Staff and his revelation of the joke, which inspired his last title:

– I’m writing a cycle of poems under a general title Alice has a cat. You know – Staff smiled – this title is from the periodical ‘Szpilki’. I saw a comic cartoon there: numerous clients are gathered in the waiting room to the director’s office. The secretary announces categorically: ‘The director is busy.’ Meanwhile, the director sits at this office desk, his hands and the paper are stained with ink, as he writes with effort: ‘Alice has a cat.’ Here Staff smiles again. Staff was busy. He was writing Alice has a cat. He was starting everything from the beginning, from the smoke in the chimney.3

Różewicz’s “Kup kota w worku” recalls both, what was to be the title of Staff’s last volume, but also the joke, bearing its element of trickery of appearances. Staff smiles at the joke since this anecdote alludes to the Polish communist elites, who were promoted to directorial posts and
positions of leadership, yet were utterly incompetent; here, they are shown as verging on the illiterate. At the end of his career, Staff employed this joke in his title to self-deprecatingly comment on the difficulty of an elderly poet writing one of his final works, having to start yet again from the beginning. The outside world perceives the director or the poet as an important figure busy with complex tasks, yet he is in fact just learning to write. Now, older than the “old poet,” Różewicz positions himself as akin to Staff, and suggests that undertaking yet another project at the end of a long career has not gotten any easier, as the creative process is always a return to the beginning and to the elementary basics.

One also needs to mention here that in the Polish context, the phrase “Alice has a cat” (“Ala ma kota”) was associated with a famous textbook by Marian Falski, intended for grade one of primary school, published for the first time before WWI, and republished in various changed editions up until the late 1950s. Różewicz began his poetic career with Anxiety (Niepokój) (1947) and, like Staff, was starting from the beginning “from the smoke of the chimney” (an obvious allusion to the Holocaust). Thus, both poets share the imperative of courage of starting anew, of being true to their own instincts and creative vision, and still adding to their oeuvre in their elderly years works that do not fit an already well-established formula and unsettle the critical opinion.

2.2 “Work in progress” and belonging to his generation

The second part of the title, the English expression, “work in progress”, recalls the phrase under which James Joyce hid the proper title of his last novel, Finnegans Wake (1939), before it was published. Undoubtedly, Różewicz, an avid reader of modernist literature, has Joyce in mind; he alludes to the Irish writer more directly in the prose section of the volume “przyj dziewczę przyj”: “and to think that the finegas Ganze is thought of as a masterpiece of world literature” Although Różewicz asserts that in his poetry, he is the antithesis of the old poet (Staff), one wonders if, at the end of his career, while writing Kup kota w worku, that Różewicz thinks, like Staff, “An empty room will remain after me / and a tight-lipped, quiet fame”( “Zostanie po mnie pusty pokój / i malomówna cicha sława”). He cites these few lines from a poem by Staff as an epigraph
to one of his sketches, which he devotes to his old friend, in *Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego*. This citation comes from Staff’s poem “Ostatni z mego pokolenia” (“The last of my generation”) published posthumously in his 1958 volume entitled *Dziewięć Muz* (Nine Muses). It also echoes however, the famous ending of Tadeusz Borowski’s poem, *Pieśń (A Song)*: “Scraps of metal will remain after us / and a deafening, mocking laugh of generations” (“Zostanie po nas złom żelazny / i głuchy, drwiący śmiech pokoleń”) in which Borowski tackles the role and experience of WWII of his generation. The associations do not end there, however. The citation from Staff also reverberates with the Romantic poet, Juliusz Słowacki’s famous “Testament mój” (My Testament), in which he writes: “This fatal strength will remain after me” (“Zostanie po mnie ta siła fatalna...”). All of these intertexts refer to a poet’s generational testament, which I think is not without significance in Różewicz’s use of these allusions. As many of Różewicz’s contemporaries have already passed on, he may see himself as one of “the last one(s) of (his) generation.” In other words, nearing the end of his life, the poet takes into account that each publication may be his last one. What will remain as his testament? And what is the testament of his own generation?, he seems to be asking.

The possible intertexts of Różewicz’s title do not end here, however. The idea of “work in progress”, while experimental in high modernism, is now a mass produced phenomenon. It has become somewhat of an “epidemic” and is used by many artists, especially in the theatre, where nothing seems to be finished and everything is presented as “work in progress”, therefore escaping the critical evaluation of a finished work of art. Thus, the relationship of the imperative of the title “*Kup kota w worku*” and of the subtitle “work in progress” is one where one in fact does buy a “pig in a poke” if the work is unfinished. It is also unfinished in the sense that it can always be recycled. None of the critics reviewing this volume picked up on yet another reference to an image of secret contents of a sack, shown in the 1971 volume mentioned earlier. Różewicz is probably one of his own most careful readers, therefore it seems impossible that the parallel between the contents of the sack in *Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego* (1971) are not alluded to in *Kup kota w worku*. This allusion, although seemingly crude, addresses the questions of the poet’s legacy and relevance, and of the role of literature in contemporary times. This short dramatic sketch deserves to be cited in full:
WHAT DO YOU HAVE HERE?
The scene is happening in a recycling depot.

A young and good looking country-bumpkin in a tuxedo, in patent-leather shoes, carries a sack on his back. He wipes his face with a lace sleeve of his white dress shirt. He puts the sack on the scale. The manager of the Center of Recycling Depot looks onto the scale.

MANAGER: What do you have here?

FARMHAND (kicks the sack with the toe of his shoe): Nothing much...

MANAGER: I’ll not buy a pig in a poke.
FARMHAND: eee … only a bit of old rags… nothing worth talking about.
MANAGER: Lets see, lets see.
FARMHAND: What’s there to show? You, sir, might only get dirty...
MANAGER: Untie the sack, I’ll look.
FARMHAND (unties the sack reluctantly). You, manager sir, are such a Doubting Thomas.
MANAGER: (looks into the sack): And what is this, an arm?
FARMHAND: eee… what kind of arm?
MANAGER: Well, I see here a human arm with five fingers.
FARMHAND: And what’s so surprising. It was always so, with five fingers...
MANAGER: You’re lying, tell me immediately, and if not, get out of here...
FARMHAND: I brought grandpa, that’s all. What’s the big deal
MANAGER: Don’t you abandon any grandpas here. Is here still alive at least?
FARMHAND: Sure, alive, but he’s sleeping… tired after coming all that way. So what, you gonna take it?
MANAGER: and what I will do with it?
FARMHAND: Take it or leave it (ties the sack), you don’t want it, then no, I’ll throw it into water.

(...)
MANAGER: Don’t you have God in your heart?
FARMHAND: But god is dead.

(…)
Masz babo placek, And what will I do with it, it shits under itself, it’s blind, as deaf as a post; the city folk have it good, they’ll carry it to the kindergarden, or abandon it somewhere at the railstation, they only go to the movies.
MANAGER: Don’t you have a heart?
FARMHAND: ay, I don’t. 8

Both the setting of this dramatic sketch and the identity and attire of the boy are key to understanding the metaphor. We are in a recycling depot, whereas the boy making the delivery there is a simple country bumpkin dressed in fancy clothes. The Polish word “parobek” denotes a simple country man who works on the estate of a landowner, or as a servant at an inn. Yet this boy is dressed in a smoking jacket, shiny high heel shoes, and a white shirt with lace cuffs. He
speaks in a simple jargon denoting a lack of proper training in formal language. The sack he delivers to the recycling depot does not contain old newspapers but a human being, whom he refers to as a useless old grandfather. Trying to trick the manager of the depot to accept the delivery, he does not want to open the sack and reveal its contents. Finally, the manager utters the phrase “Przecież kota w worku nie kupię” (“I will not buy a pig in a poke”). Różewicz’s reader, confronted with this sketch after the publication of Kup kota w worku (work in progress), needs to ask if Różewicz intended his readers to pick up on the parallel phrase and infer that Różewicz is commenting on his own relevance and disposability. Time and time again, the poet has remarked that he is a voracious reader, devouring several newspapers daily, and even occasionally rereading old periodicals if he finds them on his table or bookshelf. He said: “My room is a depository of old paper. I may be a ‘drug addict.’ Without a morning portion of two, three dailies, I don’t feel well…” When Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego was published, Różewicz was only fifty years old, yet at the time of the writing of this volume, nearing the age of ninety, his identification with the old discarded man may be a valid question. Is he asking whether his oeuvre and legacy will be discarded in a recycling depot by a youthful simpleton who pretends at high culture? Are we, his current readers, these country bumpkins in fancy clothes that are undermining his relevance?

2.3 Respect towards and responsibility for words

Lastly, other intertexts to Różewicz’s title are two works by a famed Polish lexicographer, Władysław Kopaliński, and his two books published in the 1970s, which both use the phrase “kot w worku” (“pig in a poke”) in the title. The first, published in 1975, is Kot w worku: czyli z dziejów powiedzeń i nazw; the second is entitled Drugi kot w worku czyli z dziejów nazw i rzeczy, and was published in 1978. I do not think that this intertext is merely a coincidence, since Różewicz’s volume deals with the current condition of language, and his narrator laments the disappearance of the Polish language and the influx of English. Kopaliński was a leading authority on the origins of the Polish language and the origins of words, so much so that the phrase, “look it up in Kopaliński,” has entered contemporary colloquial Polish. Różewicz, in the current volume states: “we are people limited by words” (“my jesteśmy ludźmi ograniczonymi...”)
przez słowo,”)\(^{10}\) while proclaiming that he always remains the guardian of the word:

> I guard one thing: the Word. I don’t renounce that. I consider people who play with words as stupid and unhappy or happy and handicapped beings. It is not via stuttering, dislodging, torturing words, syllables, sounds… but by ‘completely normal’ words and sentences, one can inform the interested about the death of so called Poetry… \(^{11}\)

The reader wonders, however, why this “guardian of the word” chose to open his *Kup Kota w worku* with “pages of logorrhea”, as one critic described the volume.\(^{12}\) Why does he go against his own directive and subject his reader to “stuttering, dislodging, torturing words, syllables, sounds” in the opening of his volume, and, as such, force his reader to read against the current of a text that refuses linear reading or any kind of straightforward comprehension?

### 3 When the readers are literary critics

#### 3.1 Is the poet multiplying the chaos of contemporary reality?

Before I propose my own reading of Różewicz’s volume and attempt to answer some of the aforementioned questions about the poet’s authorial strategies through which he models the reading of this text, let us address its critical reception. Although some critics responded positively to *Kup kota w worku*, it has also drawn sceptical and negative reviews. Andrzej Franaszek, for example, wrote in the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*: “If in reality – as the poet has assured us since the 1960s – ‘the modern man / falls in all directions / simultaneously’, then the poems from ‘Kot w worku’ do not present any antithesis to this fall, rather than disclosing a certain truth by opposing chaos, they only multiply the chaos. (…) These diagnoses are not new. Of course, they are also not without value. The problem lies somewhere else: in the strategy, and quality of execution.”\(^{13}\) The critic marvels that Różewicz is capable of incorporating within the same volume poems of great merit and also poorly crafted and banal works, yet he still claims that the volume should be remembered, if only for two poems, namely *Credo* and *Niebieska linia*.\(^{14}\) Commenting on the vastness of genres included in this volume, rather than conceiving it
as consisting of works divided by a vast gap of quality, Tadeusz Nyczek posits that this text may be “the most crazy in terms of content, and genres,” asserting that this signifies a “boundless creative energy of the writer, who instead of resting on laurels, still sprightly battles the all-encompassing stupidity.”

Piotr Rybicki concurs with Nyczek and sees the power of this volume as lying in its composition, arguing that the seeming disjunction of the work into quasi prose, dramatic, and poetic forms, in reality stands as an attempt at blurring all literary genealogical boundaries. Różewicz has been blurring such lines for decades.

Many critics unanimously concur that the real “hero” of this poetic volume is our contemporary reality. Andrzej Franaszek, for instance, has asserted as much. Marcin Orliński has agreed, that *Kup kota w worku* “is a non-banal story about banality, which permeates the contemporary world”, simultaneously proclaiming Różewicz still to be “an eternally youthful poet.”

What defines Różewicz as youthful, in Orliński’s esteem, is that the poet is able to pastiche the language of contemporary youth, the language of blogs and colourful magazines. The critic suggests that if one focused only on the parodic parts of this volume, Różewicz could appear once again as a postmodernist; yet one refrains from such an evaluation due to the presence of poems, which remind the audience of the classic, distanced Różewicz. Tomasz Bocheński concurs with Orliński that Różewicz should not be read as a postmodernist. In his review, he draws a parallel between Różewicz’s multi-genre and multi-voiced *Kup kota w worku* and the Polish modernist Witkacy’s concept of “powieść worek” (“novel as a sack”) into which one can insert what one wishes. Witkacy’s sack-like form was intended to parallel the sack-like consciousness of the Polish inter-war reader. Yet, it is not this comparison that is most valuable in Bocheński’s observations. Rather, it is his claim that in this volume, Różewicz is fearful of being read as a precursor of postmodernism (which he has been considered to be in Polish criticism), yet a postmodernism of banality, brutality, and shoddiness. He sees Różewicz as the writer inspired by the modernist garbage heap of culture, not the “hiperccontemporary, fashionable” postmodernist one.

Finally, two voices which bring a vital new perspective into the critical discussion of this volume are those of Tadeusz Dąbrowski and Andrzej Skrendo. Dąbrowski’s analysis underscores both the poet's dialectic of indulgence in the informational garbage heap of pop culture and his
distance from it, while also positing its noteworthy theatricality. He writes that the “prose, tricks, short and longer poems, and poemas, which comprise this book, create a dramaturgical whole, a performance with the newspaper, TV and internet in the background, which is a tale of the poet’s digging through popculture’s trash to reach a person and poetry, and simultaneously of bidding it farewell and needing to abandon it.” Dąbrowski notes that Różewicz uses mass culture as a weapon against itself, and bombards us with kitsch in order to prompt in us a longing for silence, and poetry. Moreover, he proposes that we should probe Różewicz’s aesthetic fascination with what is trivial and shoddy. Andrzej Skrendo also raises this issue when he exclaims: “On the surface it is only the anger of a poet and the screams of media world, yet how much fascination one has to have with that which repulses to write such a book!”

3.2 Structural disjunction?

My position in relation to these critical responses lies closest to those critics (i.e. Piotr Rybicki and Tadeusz Dąbrowski) who have noted that it is in fact the strength and power of the volume that lie in the opposition or structural disjunction of the volume. Observations pointing to the fact that Różewicz is haunted by the garbage heap of mass culture are not new (thus critics who concentrate mainly on this feature in their evaluations of Kup kota w worku have failed at the practice of rereading, of which Różewicz is a proponent). Andrzej Franaszek’s claims that Różewicz only adds to the all-encompassing chaos, rather than opposing it, is precisely a reading distinguished by a lack of the kind of attention called for by Różewicz’s ethics of rereading. Franaszek seems unwilling to “circularly haunt” Różewicz’s text with due attention until the seeming chaos can reveal itself as a puzzle. Dąbrowski and Skrendo do this volume justice by pointing out some of its key features (Skrendo noting Różewicz’s deep fascination with the garbage heap of pop culture and simultaneous repulsion with it, and Dąbrowski the theatricality and performative aspect of the text). Only such reading, in my opinion, one which pays equal attention to the circular haunting of pop culture babble of the early parts of the volume, as well as to the latter parts where Różewicz returns to his more predictable voice, is one which is able to trace the secrets of the text and highlight the poet’s obsessions and vulnerabilities. Where so many critical readings fall short, and what my interpretation of this
volume aims to acknowledge, is Rózewicz’s “writerly rereading”\textsuperscript{24} of texts, and his authorial strategies of textual dynamics, which are influenced by his anticipation of readerly judgements. Moreover, none of the critical readings of this volume address the notion of ethics of the act of reading, which for Rózewicz is a vital part of the responsibility and the conduct of one’s life.

In my analysis, I will focus first on the authorial strategy of multi-voicing, which in my view, Rózewicz adopts simultaneously to promote his new text and to criticize the commercialism of the current literary market. In order to highlight this simultaneous critique of literary commercialism and the author’s marketing ploy, I will trace the interplay of the voices of the implied author and the unreliable narrator. It is the instabilities and tensions of these voices that will show the possible function of multivoicing in this text. Next, I will address the authorial strategy of sharing secrets employed by the poet to guide his readers to an ethically engaged reading praxis. I will call on the rhetorical perspective of reading the narrative as explored by Matei Calinescu and James Phelan to help me interpret Rózewicz’s strategy of secret sharing. Both Calinescu and Phelan advocate rhetorical re-reading of the text as a puzzle, yet while Calinescu suggests paying special attention to the deliberate nature of secrecy, i.e. calculated withholding of information, Phelan emphasizes the ethical dimension of reading for the secret. Both theorists will aid my attempt to show that Rózewicz aims to implicate the reader in secret sharing and presses his readerly audience to make ethical choices. Finally, the theory of the reading process as voiced by J. Hillis Miller will assist me in understanding the responsibility of the ethical process of reading which Rózewicz’s texts demand. For Miller reading signifies a “double movement”, a movement of the unfolding and emerging text in the process of reading, and a movement from the individual reader who “takes possession” of the text and the world.\textsuperscript{25} When I will address the combating, yet vulnerable poet, especially in instances when Rózewicz shows a concern with legacy (not only his own, but also of the lives of others), Miller’s concept of reading as an ethical act which translates from the private realm into the public sphere will be very important in my discussion. I will show that what Miller calls a “further act of language” is indeed an ethical act of responsibility which Rózewicz’s texts require.
4  The tricks and turns of the reading process: the reader, the narrator, and the audience

4.1 Reading and rereading the female voice rhetorically

When we examine the reading praxis in response to Różewicz's poetics, one is quickly reminded of the poet's “spirit of perverse contrariness” (“duch perwersyjnej przekory”). In the opening prose text of Kup kota w worku, for example, the poet of silences, gaps, and absences adopts a youthful female voice to not only parody the galvanizing linguistic gibberish of popular media and literature but also to allow it to compromise itself. He immerses himself in contemporary popular culture since it is a force that overwhelmingly permeates and satiates our daily reality. Poetry, according to this writer, should reflect everyday language and life, thus Różewicz gives in to this fascination with the everyday and ordinary. Therefore, in this volume we discover that which comprises our daily reality (multiplicity of voices and texts; TV, radio, internet, newspapers, and literature). Różewicz implies that one cannot escape popular culture since it affects and shapes our reception of all texts. Consequently, in assuming a female voice in the opening of his text, Różewicz showcases his parodic prowess in easily capturing the authenticity of such speech. Yet, is this the only role of this youthful and “hip”, if completely devoid of intelligence, female voice? The vast majority of the critique of contemporary literature, of reading practices and habits, and of social folly writ large, appears precisely in this female voice. Różewicz wants this voice of a successful young authoress to compromise itself.

In my reading of Różewicz’s authorial strategy employed in this opening prose section and its inscribed readerly response, I will call on Phelan’s rhetorical theory. Phelan focuses on the multilayered process of writing and reading and its relationships between the authorial agency, textual phenomena, and readerly response which ultimately reveal the larger purpose of a narrative. I argue that in the opening section of this volume, Różewicz uses the strategy of multi-voicing to draw his reader in, but more importantly to highlight his sarcastic critique of popular culture’s debilitating forces. The poet accomplishes both objectives, of drawing the reader in and of critique of popular culture, through the instability and tension between the voices of the reliable and unreliable narrators in this volume. Phelan’s rhetorical approach is
particularly fitting for my purposes here of addressing the role of voice and multi-voicing in Różewicz’s text. I will focus on the different levels of voice and distinguish between authorial audience and narrative audience, unreliable versus reliable narrators, and multi-voicing, all as a means of managing the reader’s engagement through instability and tension. I will precisely define these categories and point out the vital distinctions between them as they come up in my analysis.

When the reader opens *Kup kota w worku*, s/he encounters a feminine voice. This is the first surprise of this text. A familiar reader of Polish contemporary literature can infer that this unnamed voice might belong to Dorota Maślowska, a Polish writer who debuted at the age of eighteen with the controversial and widely publicized *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą białoczerwoną* (2002). Readers are led to infer as much since we are given snippets of information, which point to well known facts from Maślowska’s biography. Maślowska’s first novel, translated into English under the title *Snow White and Russian Red* (Grove Press, US) or *White and Red* (Atlantic Books, UK), was nominated for the Nike literary prize in 2003. At that time, she was famously just eighteen years old, finishing her final year of high school. I should also add here that she was strongly promoted by the publishing house *Lampa i Iskra Boża* and the literary critic at its helm, Paweł Dunin-Wąsowicz. Różewicz alludes to these facts by having his female voice highlight her age: “well, I! This year’s high school graduate and novelist I make mistakes and I am not ashamed of it besides at this moment all orthography is in question since we internet users shorten words to letters discard capitals and in general one or two letters less in a text message makes a style.” The old poet, who for some time now has been famously announcing his disregard for orthography, here, tongue in cheek, highlights this commonality with the young female blogger. Moreover, Różewicz, in adapting a female voice, alludes also to Dorota Maślowska’s famous narrative gesture in her *Snow White and Russian Red*, where she narrated in a male voice using the colloquial jargon typical of youth subcultures of hoodies or charvers (“dresiarze”), and made herself one of the characters in her book. Thus, in Różewicz’s text we read:

*I wrote the last sentence of my novel on February 24th 2006 and today is March 3rd 2006 and it’s not known if it’s March or of March but what happened between these two Fridays Nothing filled with pandemic of the flu with its first victim the cat… this stream of*
However, despite the assertion that the narrator will change gender and start narrating as a male voice (“more so as a he than she”) ("raczej ten niż ta"), Różewicz contrarily maintains the guise of a female voice throughout the full opening section of this volume, entitled “Przyj dziewczę przyj” (“Push girl push”). When this section ends, the female voice disappears; thus we can infer an authorial disclosure here, that the writer is already getting tired and perhaps bored of this “stream of consciousness” monologue taking him into an alternate reality. My assertion here that Różewicz’s prose parodies and alludes to the works of Dorota Masłowska is not innovative by any means. Similar claims have already been voiced by numerous critics who reviewed Różewicz’s volume, such as Piotr Bratkowski or Szymon Babuchowski, to name only a couple. Moreover, such critical reading is not innovative in itself, as the poet himself points his readers in that direction by openly proclaiming: “we speak like masłowska and not słowacki or bogurodzica since students want to be on top… what type of language is this written in it’s normal that language folds upon itself there are many poles who don’t understand words spoken in a café the diet family circle and the senat circle…”

4.2 The strategy of multi-voicing

The reader immediately notes the difference of tone between the two aforementioned citations. “I wrote the last sentence of my novel” (“Ostatnie zdanie mojej powieści napisałam…”) and “we speak like masłowska and not słowacki” (“mówimy masłowską a nie słowackim…”) seem to belong to two different speakers, one unreflectively chattering away in a self-proclaimed and self-absorbed “stream of consciousness” monologue, the other critically evaluating the state of language, noting its deterioration, and lack of its capacity to bring about a more complex or nuanced understanding of the world around us. However, in these parallel rhetorical acts, the differences go deeper, as Różewicz uses the unreliable narrative voice in the first instance, and a reliable narrative voice in the latter fragment, intending both to be recognized as such by his authorial audience. Let us clarify, precisely, these terms, ‘reliable’ and ‘unreliable narrator’.
follow Phelan, who in turn follows Wayne Booth’s definition of reliable narrator as one who not only shares the norms of the implied author, but also perceives the facts of the narrative in the same way the implied author does. An unreliable narrator, on the other hand, is defined as one who deviates from the implied author’s perceptions of narrative facts and / or from the implied author’s norms and values. I utilize these categories of narrative theory since I believe that the opening narrative prose section of *Kup kota w worku* lends itself to a narrative rather than lyric analysis. Thus, the female voice in Różewicz’s opening, under the guise of Masłowska’s persona functions similarly to an unreliable narrator.

The poet uses it in order to highlight the intellectual and ethical divide between his own voice and the female speaker. Are we to trust the young female voice that a week has passed and nothing of significance has happened? This “nothing” in fact alludes to the famed “Nothing” (“Nic”), which has a long history within Różewicz’s tropes. Różewicz expects that his reader will pick up on the fact that the “nothing” in the middle of the sentence is written with a capital letter, thus making this allusion clear. Whereas the female voice that is unreflectively talking about the banality of the everyday (the flu, boredom with her writing, the fact that nothing is happening) is directed at her implied narrative audience, an audience that accepts her norms and values, the authorial audience is meant to understand the philosophical difference in the author’s attitude to banality. It is indeed a different “Nic” (“nothingness”). The female voice simply takes the “nothingness” at face value, as the boredom and banality of everyday existence. Różewicz’s “Nic,” on the other hand, came into his oeuvre more than half a century ago, bearing philosophical and ethical dimensions. Różewicz’s “Nic” takes its roots from a long tradition of European philosophy, stretching centuries, from Plato to Nietzsche. It was Heidegger who repeated, after Hegel: “das reine Sein und das reine Nichts ist dasselbe” (“pure being and pure nothingness are the same”). Yet as Cezary Wodziński asserts, if one thinks that Różewicz’s “Nic” is a manifestation of nihilism, then one understands “nothing.” Stanisław Dłuski rhetorically asks, if “nothingness in this [Różewicz’s] poetry is only an emblem of ‘empty existence’, or does it open a perspective on complex philosophical, anthropological, or (...) worldview problems?” It is precisely the female voice who speaks of simply an “empty existence” and seems not to recognize its allusion neither to philosophy, nor to Różewicz’s famous trope. Różewicz, on the other hand, in the volume *Nothing Dressed in Prospero’s Cloak*
(1962) (*Nic w płaszczu Prospera*), in a poem by the same title, writes: “nothing comes / nothing in Prospero’s magic robes / nothing from streets and lips / from pulpits and towers / nothing from loudspeakers / speaks to nothing / about nothing / nothing begets nothing / nothing brings up nothing / (...) nothing awaits nothing / nothing threatens / nothing condemns / nothing pardons.”

This may be the civilizational “nothingness”, which in Zygmunt Bauman’s language is the “liquid modernity”, a reality in which, more and more, “meaning is becoming devoid of meaning.” Różewicz wrote about this daily reality drowning in a civilizational garbage heap of banal things and words without meaning first in a poem titled “Didactic story” (*Opowiadanie dydaktyczne*, 1962). The motif of the garbage heap of contemporary culture, characterized by the proliferation of commercial consumption, intellectual emptiness, and the demise of ethics, reoccurs later on many times. Instances include in a theatrical portrayal of a growing garbage heap in the drama *The Old Woman Broods* (*Stara kobieta wysiaduje*, 1968), and in the 1990s in the metaphor of “recycling”, (and *zawsze fragment. Recycling*, 1996). What worries Różewicz most about the contemporary world is our readiness to forget, thus marking the present as a time devoid of self-knowledge and the capacity for self-identification. We engage in hurried (and fragmented) attempts at filling in the emptiness, “they do this and that / and so on” (“robią wiec to i owo/ i tak dalej”; P2, 116), and on the existential plane, these attempts manifest themselves as compulsive consumption, showing first and foremost its sensory, perceptual greediness “wszystkożerność” “nowego człowieka”, who inhales and “passes everything through himself” (“przepuszcza przez siebie / wszystko”; *Nowy człowiek*; P2, 483). Mass culture tries to satisfy its “consumers”; mass consumption and mass production bring about the disappearance of aesthetic criteria in art. This thesis upsets Różewicz, who in conversation with Witold Zalewski cries out: “What are you saying, Sir, fables about lack of criteria… it’s a little theory convenient for some kind of cynical rebels, for authors lacking talent, for qualifying committees (here Różewicz bursts into laughter), for critics lacking intelligence or conscience.” In yet another conversation, this time with Kazimierz Braun, Różewicz explains: “We are in a phase ‘write if you can’ – (...) ‘save yourself if you can.’ A huge wave of babble, pseudo-philosophy, formlessness is coming.”
Yet Różewicz’s “Nic” may also be one of silence, akin to Norwid’s silence (“milczenie”) and concealment (“przemilczenie”), as well as to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (a philosopher whom Różewicz has been reading and rereading for decades) famous conception from Tractatus logico-philosophicus (1922) that “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” which includes the ineffable metaphysics. Różewicz himself is a reader who builds decade-long, and even lifelong, relationships with the authors and texts he reads. These are deeply personal conversations with the worldviews, philosophical, and aesthetic theories he encounters in texts. He not only reads, but re-reads, slowly, painstakingly assessing and re-evaluating the texts and his own reactions. “Slow down, do not rush!”—Różewicz seems to be saying to his ideal readers. If we gallop through Różewicz’s texts we will not only miss his secrets, his purposeful traps, and his mastery, but also remain caught on the surface of the banal. It is important to note here, that the female speaker of Różewicz’s opening is caught in her own “stream of consciousness” monologue, showing her pathetic self-importance and shortsighted self-absorption. Różewicz’s experience of reading, on the other hand, is one of an engaged dialogue, of life-long rereading, careful listening and assessment of the interlocutor’s voice and of oneself, and finally of intellectual commitment. In a poem titled “They came to see a poet” (“Przyszli, żeby zobaczyć poetę”) (1983) which stages a conversation between a poet and a youth attending his poetry reading, the poet declares: “I do nothing / (…) I was maturing for fifty years / towards this difficult task / when ‘I don’t do anything’ / I do NOTHING.” With that poem, written after the Martial Law in Poland, Różewicz commented on his own helplessness, but also on the political opposition taking shape. Interestingly, after this 1983 poem, the poet literally fell into silence and stopped publishing until he again re-emerged on the literary scene in 1991 with the volume titled Plaskorzęba (Bas-relief). The authorial audience must return to Różewicz’s “Nic” (“nothingness”) with its various contexts and meanings either in actual texts or at least in their memory. Only then will the reader grasp why the week of nothingness, which the female voice speaks of, is filled with a “pandemic of the flu”, which first affects the “cat”, or perhaps Różewicz’s “Kup kota w worku.” Różewicz pre-emptively reduces his “Nic” in the voice of the female narrator to the banality of everyday boredom and gibberish, perhaps wanting to annul it himself, as he observes similar elimination / disregard / forgetting, or perhaps the banalization of his earlier intellectual discoveries and practices. Thus, his commentary on the “pandemic of the
“flu” may not be only an objection to the kind of young voices akin to Masłowska on the Polish literary scene, but perhaps what irritates him more is the enthusiastic critical reception these works garner.

4.3 Values: assessing instabilities and tensions

By using multi-voicing, or various voices seemingly found within one voice (the narrator’s), Różewicz ensures readerly engagement through instability and tension. The trite female voice brings with it an “estranging unreliability” which creates distance between the author and the reader, yet it is the multi-dimensional tonality of both voices (the character-narrator’s and the implied author’s) that ensure readerly engagement. Should we, as readers, see the reality presented through the narrator’s eyes, without evaluating or judging that vision? When Różewicz overwhelms us with nonsensical babble under the guise of a female voice, should we dismiss it quickly as an easy parody on the part of the poet? I propose that we should track it carefully and mark the subtle change of tone where the speaker fades back into the image of the implied author (where that distinction between the narrator and the author seems not to exist); at that point, we will be able to note the juncture of instability and tension. Instabilities are defined as unstable relationships between characters and/or their circumstances, while tensions denote the discrepancy of knowledge, value, judgement, opinion, or belief between narrators and readers or authors and readers. This is how narrative progression and readerly engagement are generated. Therefore, when Różewicz parodies this shallow gibberish of “stream of consciousness” of popular culture in the voice of the female narrator, the readers also situate themselves emotively and ethically in a relationship to this voice. Phelan suggests that voice is a fusion of style, tone and values, and that therefore, listening to a narrative, implies in part listening to the values associated with a given way of talking. Let us listen to Różewicz’s parody again:

\[\text{it's a great day, I got eye lashes... I also got a nomination to nikiki together with Tadzik Rysiek and Mietek and Kazia Kielbasa who has a title of miss universe and a role in TV series magpie harem guaranteed... I forgot that the nomination got also Janek the Black Wizard old kindly priest for that volume about a ladybug but I am not sure if a priest can promote a ladybug which is a supermarket and is called as it is fitting to our Christian and judeo roots, 'God's cow'...}\]
The reader immediately understands more than what the voice unwittingly reveals, and effortlessly marks the discrepancy between the author’s values and those expressed by the voice of the speaker. The reader notes that this is a double-voiced discourse conveying a difference in values and judgements, and thus we evaluate this voice from the perspective of an authorial audience who understands that the voice serves a parodic purpose. What else, however, other than a smile or a laugh, does the speaker conjure in the reader?

When we read that a day can be pleasant (“fajny”) because one can both receive fake eyelashes (presumably as a gift) and be nominated for the Nike prize, the most prestigious literary award in Poland, we gather that Różewicz wants to expose the trivialization and infantilization of popular culture. Those two events, obtaining fake eyelashes and a literary nomination, are seen as being at the same level of importance and value. The Nike prize, here, is trivialized by a diminutive neologism, “nikiki.” Furthermore, the nominees themselves are trivialized by a similar use of diminutives: “Tadzik”, “Rysiek”, “Mietek”, “Janek (...) księżyna.” Further among this list of preposterous candidates is “Kazia Kielbasa” who seems to be a model (“who has a title of miss universe (...) guaranteed”) and an actress for she landed a role in a hilarious TV series “magpie harem.”

Moreover, this monologue is built by superimposing various meanings of words from different spheres of language and culture. Accumulating these meanings leads to a diffusion of sense/meaning, rather than leading to precision. Różewicz thus plays with language, wanting his reader to see that the female narrator haphazardly draws on different etymological meanings and cultural references, yet in doing so, alludes to that which is “cute”, infantilized, ultimately bringing everything down to the level of silliness or to promotion and commercialism. Thus: “Janek (...) old kindly priest” (“Janek (...) stary poczciwy księżyna”), denoting Jan Twardowski, a famous priest-poet in the Polish context, who becomes (“a mag / wisard”) “Czarnoksiężnik”, since a priest wears black robes, thus the word for “black” (“czarny”) is linked to the derogatory word for “priest” (“księżyna”), resulting in “mag-priest” (“Czarnoksiężnik”). Further, the female narrative voice contends that Twardowski was nominated for the poetic volume about a ladybug, and perceives it as undoubtedly a promotion for a supermarket chain, known by the same Polish word “Biedronka.”. Twardowski was the author of religious, simple poems, which employ both
nature and occasional colloquialisms. He famously wrote many poems about ladybugs such as “Ant, dragonfly, ladybug” (“Mrówko, ważko, biedronko”) and “A prayer to St. John of the Cross” (“Modlitwa do Św. Jana od Krzyża”), and published a volume titled One has to go on, or the walk of a ladybug (Trzeba iść dalej, czyli spacer biedronki, 1996). Yet here he becomes the promoter of a “Ladybug” supermarket. The supermarket chain, “Biedronka”, inversely is associated with the name “boża krówka”, which is, in turn, linked to our “judeo-Christian roots” (“korzenie judeo-chrześcijańskie”) and is also a folk name for the insect. This folk rendition of the “ladybug,” known in British English as the “lady bird” was present in the Polish language in the 19th century, deriving from an Old Church Slavonic adjective, “bedrь,” which means “having spots on the hips”, “spotty.” The name for the “ladybug” may have developed through the insect’s visual association with the dialect words” “biedrona”, “biedruna”, “biedrawa”, and “biedrula”, which are names for spotted cows, of the type which most commonly proliferated in Poland.

The question is, does the author expect the reader to unearth the different intertextual, cultural, and linguistic facets of this monologue or is the recognition of superimposition of different linguistic meanings enough? I would argue that Różewicz wants his authorial audience to recognize the layering of linguistic meaning, yet points to the fact that the female speaker equates everything with commercialism and promotion, questioning “czy kaplan może promować biedronkę” (“whether a priest can promote biedronka”). In this guise, both linguistic word play and the issue of literary recognition via literary prizes are truly brought down to pure, banal commercialism.

4.4 Promotion and the literary market

In this parody of stream of consciousness narration, the narrator exposes the issues that bother Różewicz the most, one of these being the lack of true value and significance of current literary prizes. The absence of value of such awards comes from the fact that it seems there is no critical evaluation of an authors’ œuvre by the selection committee and critics, since competing for the same prize are both authors of rapid fame, one-time bestsellers brought to commercial success by
powerful media promotion, and those of established reputations and a lifetime of achievements.

The company of writers nominated for the Nike prize consists of both fake and possible allusions to real authors who clearly do not share the same literary rank. The familiar diminutive “Tedzio” may refer to Tadeusz Różewicz himself, whereas Mietek could potentially refer to Różewicz’s friend Mieczysław Porębski, nominated for the prize in 1998 for his book Deska (1997), and again in 2004 for a book entitled Nowosielski (2003), which refers to another of the poet’s friends, the painter and professor of art history, Jerzy Nowosielski. Rysiek may denote the multiple nominee Ryszard Przybylski (in 1999, Przybylski was nominated for Baśni zimowa: Esej o starości (1998); in 2000, for another book Rozhukany koń: Esej o myśleniu Juliusza Słowackiego (1999); and in 2004 for Krzemieniec. Opowieści o rozsądku zwyciężonych (2003)).

Janek “księżyna” denotes the already mentioned priest-poet Twardowski, who was never nominated for the Nike prize, although he did receive other prizes, the most prestigious being the TOTUS prize (known as the “Catholic Nobel”) in 2001. Tadeusz Różewicz was nominated for the Nike prize six times, and won twice, in 1998 for Card Index Scattered (1997), and in 2000 for Mother Departs (1999). Dorota Masłowska, on the other hand has been nominated for the same prize three times, and won once, in 2006 for her novel Paw Królowej (2005).

It is worth noting here, however, that Różewicz has already decried the state of the current literary market in his earlier publications. I suggest that it is not simply the existence of promotion, or of the notion of a quick road to success which translates into profit that is problematic for the poet; it is rather the fact that his works have to compete with others, to say the least, of questionable literary value. In his volume Szara Strefa (2003), he notes the presence of such authors as Borys Jelcyn with his bestseller, positioned vis-à-vis his own poetry and works of authors of such caliber as Leszek Kołakowski and Czesław Miłosz during a promotional book event in Frankfurt:

\[\text{in October of 2000 / I was at a Book Fair in Frankfurt / (...) eight hundred publishers / or maybe eight thousand publishers / exhibited hundred thousand new titles / million books / there appeared also / ‘the pope of German literature and criticism’ / five hundred poets (of both genders) / read their poems / ja ja lessen macht schön / (schreiben macht häßlich) / yet the biggest success attained / Boris Yeltsin with his bestseller / champagne vodka and caviar}\]

Różewicz ridicules the fact that commercialism places in competition world-class writers and
philosophers like Miłosz or Kołakowski together onto one bookshelf with sensational literature, most likely authored by ghost writers, and of dubious literary quality to say the least. Noting this culture of quick commercial success and sensationalist marketing tactics, the poet himself answers by marketing his own works in a novel way. Photographs, the poet’s satirical drawings, even the numerous hand-written versions of the poems themselves, which abound in recent volumes of Różewicz’s poetry, could be seen both as documenting the creative process, but also as a marketing strategy. In a literary market promoting thousands of new publications, bursting with countless shoddy bestsellers, Różewicz still chooses to compete. After all, he makes an effort to attend the event in Frankfurt, and moreover also to recount his experience in a poem. Is the elderly poet a little concerned that Yeltsin will overshadow him?

In the opening prose section of Kup kota w worku Różewicz tries, possibly, to market his new text via the shock value of the naïve female voice, and simultaneously offer a strong critique of commercialism of the current literary market in which his works have to compete. He utilizes the authorial strategy of multi-voicing to achieve this aim. The tone once again changes, and the reader notes the emergence of the implied author within the voice of the formerly unreliable narrator. The playful parody transforms into a sneering evaluation of the state of contemporary literature, of language, of the literary market and of its readership. Already in the 1990s, a critical debate about the state of Polish literature concluded that, on the post-communist literary scene, thought to be characterized by a state of normalcy, i.e. where there is no artificially divided camp of writers (those privileged by the political system, on the one hand, and those excluded and alienated, on the other), we have, instead, a pervasiveness of dominating media discourse which regulates everything: literature and its success, market presence, publishing, visibility. The dominating media discourse shapes and promotes what is fashionable, determines hierarchies, and annihilates everything that does not fit its boundaries. Różewicz tackles the lack of hierarchy of aesthetic and ethical values within the literary market, and vehemently opposes the infantilization of culture and language as it strips both culture and language of meaning, significance, responsibility and ethics. The narrator of the prose section in Kup kota w worku contends:

*we were left with a super-universal word cool (fajny) which replaces the philological dictionary psychological theological and in general... and it declines like various old adjectives for ex. swell, fajny fajna fajne fajnego fajnemu fajny o! fajny in fajnym and it*
can describe every artist and every work of art this is a word which has replaced
everything and reflects precisely our attitude towards everything\textsuperscript{47}

Here Różewicz embarks on what is called “writerly rereading”; he re-reads a text for the purpose
of parodying or re-writing it, and simultaneously exploits the power of multi-voicing. He re-
writes and re-reads himself (his own earlier text) by evoking the famous scene from his Card
Index (1960) in which the hero, lying in bed, examines his own hand, while simultaneously
uttering the noun in its different case declensions. Whereas in Kartoteka, the gesture was linked
to the symbolic understanding of the war and post-war experiences, which changed the anti-hero
into a blasé everyman, in Kup kota w worku, the declensions of the word “fajny” also clearly
show the changed reality in which any hierarchy of values has been muddied or even lost.
Therefore, the word “fajny” describes not only a postmodern ethical and aesthetic relativism, but
also a necessary “lightness” of subject, which is meant to entertain and thus please the audience.
Would the goal then, in such a reality, of a lost hierarchy of aesthetic values, be to be trite and
amusing enough to appeal to an audience that would “favourably’ describe the writer’s work as
“fajne” (“cool”)? In a way, and on one level, that is what Różewicz is trying to accomplish in this
volume. The narrator proclaims “in an independent country which has regained its freedom in
1989 and now should regain freedom equity sovernity, the language of the reigning Poles started
disappearing (…) in favour of the English language as a global tongue and the American super-
language.”\textsuperscript{48} Tongue in cheek, Różewicz obliges this lax ethos by appealing to his readers with
English language phrases, subtitling his volume as “work in progress”, as well as including an
English title for one of the handwritten poems in the volume, “An angel showing lead shot
damage.” On the other hand, he will also expose what dangers lay in this lack of critical distance
and critical thinking which embraces everything as “cool.” Thus, the infantalization of culture
and language impedes critical thinking and critical faculties and allows the notion of constantly
striving for an “easy” life / existence.

Różewicz attacks a contemporary poverty of language because critical thinking and critical
engagement with issues require a more nuanced language. If everything is reduced to the level of
“fajny” (“cool”), critical discussion cannot take place as trivialization of language leads to
trivialization of meaning and significance of issues. Różewicz attaches a vital importance to the
responsible usage of words, and to the precision of language. One such example comes from his recently published private correspondence. Before his seventieth fifth birthday, the poet wrote to his close friend Jerzy Nowosielski: “Jurku, it seems to me that we are maturing... we say less and less, I would like to reach such a perfection as to say only three words a day ... one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening ... but I don’t know which.”

One cannot help but wonder, however, if Masłowska’s famed experiments with language, which gained her such notoriety with the publication of her first novel, are not what the elderly poet finds objectionable. On the other hand, his own parody of her style is his writerly rereading and makes the prose section “push girl push” (“przyj dziewczę przyj”) precisely what it is, and it is with it the poet chooses to open the current volume. By paroding her voice, he engages the reader and maintains this readerly engagement precisely via the instability and tension between his authorial voice and the seemingly unreflective babble of the female voice from which his emerges time and time again. It may be a marketing ploy, or the “secret” cat that peers at the reader out of the sack as soon as one opens the book— a tactic that is meant to engage the youthful reader and show that Różewicz also possesses the power to be on par with the hippest of young stylists. This type of language is ridiculed first, as the volume opens, yet the most sneering parody always carries a little grain of flattery of emulation.

5 Reading and rereading as a process of sharing secrets

5.1. The text as a puzzle

In thinking through the opening prose section of Kup kota w worku, I chose to showcase Różewicz’s authorial strategy of multi-voicing. The parody of a naïve female voice operates on the tension of two voices (her own as she is also the unreliable narrator), and another voice of the reliable narrator which contains serious evaluative critique. This complimentary nature of the varied tone of these voices builds instabilities and tensions meant to engage the reader. My next task is to show that Różewicz also uses the strategy of sharing secrets, not only to involve his
readers, but also to guide us towards an ethically engaged and axiologically sound model of reading praxis. Both Calinescu and Phelan employ this notion of “reading for the secret” which naturally involves multiple rereadings and regards the text as a riddle, or puzzle.\textsuperscript{50} They differ in that Phelan foregrounds the ethical dimension of reading as an experience of sharing secrets, while Calinescu focuses on the deliberate nature of “secrecy”, which he defines as a “calculated and selected concealment of information.”\textsuperscript{51} Calinescu’s conception, however, like Phelan’s, adapts a rhetorical perspective, since he takes into account both the person/party that deliberately withholds or encodes information, as well as the role of the recipient of those secrets. Calinescu outlines five aspects of secrecy: 1) deliberateness (someone decides to hide knowledge of something), 2) selectivity (knowledge is hidden from some, but not from all); 3) double-coding of the message (coded to convey a spurious or neutral message to the layman, secretly coded again to convey the real message to the privileged); 4) implication that the concealed information can always be disclosed, made public, betrayed, guessed, or independently discovered; 5) secrecy activated meta-communicative levels (instructs the privileged addressee that the message is secret and should be treated as such).\textsuperscript{52} Phelan, on the other hand, simply asks how this secret sharing influences the ethical dimension of our reading experience, and how we are implicated as readers.\textsuperscript{53} With regards to Różewicz’s text, I will similarly ask: what is the purpose of the implied author keeping or sharing secrets, and does he aim to implicate his readers in the secret sharing? Thus, I will utilize Calinescu’s aspects of secrecy to probe the deliberateness of secrets in Różewicz’s narrative, their potential selectivity and double-coding, and whether they bear implications of possible disclosure. Phelan’s conception of rhetorical reading as secret sharing will aid my understanding of what demands Różewicz makes of his authorial audience.

Complimentary to this discussion of the ethics of secret sharing in reading/ writing is J. Hillis Miller’s conception of writing and reading as ethical acts, and as part of the ethical conduct of one’s life. Miller’s understanding of reading praxis as a reflection on the ethics of one’s life means that he demands from his ideal reader a “further act of language” which he identifies as a necessary response to the reading process. Although reading may initially seem to be primarily a matter of cognitive and epistemological deciphering of the meaning of the read text, and not an ethical matter having to do with conduct and responsibility, Miller posits that there is an ethical dimension to the act of reading as such. The critic claims that the ethics of reading always begins
with a “further act of language”, such as talking about the work, writing about it, or teaching it. He goes on to explain that once the book is read, the act of reading it, performed alone (in private) becomes public. Miller’s assertions are key to reading Różewicz’s “secrets,” as the poet deals precisely with this “further act of language” resulting from the process of reading and writing which shifts the ethics of private responsibility, or responsibility primarily to oneself, to the public sphere of ethics, of actions bearing a wider social impact.

5.2 Present past: rereading the newspaper

In the current volume Różewicz addresses ethical issues and exposes secrets of the past. He tackles the hypocrisy of artists and intellectuals, as well as the hypocrisy of systems and institutions as he draws parallels with similar phenomena taking place in contemporary Poland. All of these “secrets” are presented against the backdrop of TV and daily print news, which means that Różewicz once again engages with popular and mass culture to comment on ethics vis-à-vis daily linguistic oral and textual reality. David Galef in his preface to a volume entitled Second Thoughts: A Focus on Rereading (1998) asserts that not all texts are worth rereading, and points out that newspapers, for instance, are thrown out the day after they are read. Against Galef’s simple claim, Różewicz, both consummate reader and re-reader of daily newspapers, shows us how to carefully re-read “for the secret” precisely on this most readily and easily discarded textual material. Thus, the rereading which Różewicz expects here is not the meaningful and gratifying repetition of rereading a great work of literature, which rewards us with aesthetic or intellectual pleasure, it is rereading of the cumbersome variety (reading and rereading old, mostly “bad” news). To make this exercise worthwhile however, both for himself and the reader, the poet will reward us with his autobiographical memories, which come to the fore as a result of association with the news encountered. Here, in contrast to the introductory prose section of the volume, we hear only one voice, that of the implied author, who reads the text of the newspaper and comments on it with deep sarcasm.

A good example of how Różewicz shares secrets, what type of secrets he shares, and who are his potential “secret sharers,” is a poem entitled “Hiobowe wieści ze wszystkich frontów” (“Job’s
news from all fronts”), which shows Różewicz immersed in his “guilty pleasure” of reading daily newspapers. In this text Różewicz exploits and parodies contemporary reality and popular culture as they are present in the mass media. I posit that where the poet’s secrets are personal relating to identities of people painted in a negative light, there he is very discreet and shares his secrets with only a select few who can understand these personal allusions. These personal secrets are hinted at in Job-like news stories of greater and lesser importance.

Over the course of the poem, the poet takes us on a survey of local and international news stories. The headlines are as follows, in order of their appearance in the text: the Polish company, Bumar, lost a bid to furnish the Iraqi army with military equipment; the sculpture of the Warsaw Siren (a symbol of the capital city) was vandalized; Różewicz’s play, “Duszyczka” is being staged in a corridor in the basement of the National Theatre in Warsaw; an unnamed author, supposedly well-known during the Stalinist era, wants to enter underground / unofficial circulation (“drugi obieg”); a print run of 600,000 copies of Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix quickly sold out; computers have been infected with the “Mydoom” virus; organs in European churches have been destroyed by a mysterious virus; general reportage about the recent Day of World Peace; Polish army soldiers were accidentally injured while “playing” with loaded weapons; an announcement about the menu of the Christmas dinner for the soldiers in Afganistan’s camp Babylon; a special brigade soldier has injured himself in the toe.

There is no particular logical order to these headlines, thus their presentation recalls random pages found in a recycling depot or a garbage heap of old newspapers; yet there is a commonality among them, as these news reports are from various media sources dating to January and February of 2004. The memories they evoke are based on associations. Rereading the news brings Różewicz’s biographical past to the surface. Moreover, rereading old news brings with it a deeper understanding afforded by the distance of time and perspective. By tracing associations between news stories and fragments of biographical information, we can see how Różewicz remains guarded, utterly cognizant of the secrets he reveals. He showcases his sarcasm both towards the current news he encounters, and the memories he harbours. As already mentioned, he reveals certain secrets only to the chosen few who are already familiar with some of the facts and individuals he alludes to. When writing negatively about people, for example,
whom he regards with animosity, he chooses to withhold their identities. Nonetheless, emerging from this myriad of stories is a persona who not only remembers the past well, but holds on to the past, deeming it important.

Ryszard Nycz in “Cytaty z rzeczywistości” (“Citations from reality”), an essay which is a part of his book Tekstowy świat: poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze, (Textual world: poststructuralism and the knowledge of literature, 2000), outlines different functions of news citations in literary works. I propose that two of the functions which he outlines have particular importance for functioning of news evoked by Różewicz. One, he calls an “instrumental function” which is characterized by utilizing daily press news for the purpose of artistic, cognitive, as well as persuasive functions; the other he terms a “modelling function” which signifies that the composition of news models the image of our world on its paradigm.55 Print and video news defines reality as constantly changing, fragmentary, and atomized simultaneously occurring events. On one hand, Różewicz addictively reads and re-reads in order to make a coherent, perhaps more logical picture of reality for himself from the news sound bites that fill his daily reality. On the other hand, the poet treats the newspaper as reportage from daily reality, and since for Różewicz the common, ordinary daily reality is what his poetry aims to convey, daily news becomes enters his poetry on equally important footing as the ordinary everyday occurrences. His commentary on daily reality is not however only on the events that occurred and were reported in the news, his is also a commentary on what the news reported that it happened. This reporting / reading of reality by the different news sources is linked to yet another function of news within literary fiction outlined by Nycz. This one, the critic links to the function of news citations as a “broken tool” (a function frequently utilized by the poets of the New Wave (Nowa Fala) group. As such, fragments of news stories in Różewicz’s text become also a version of a memoir of everyday culture; a memoir which clearly shows that the tool of knowledge, cognition, and transmission of understanding of reality is undoubtedly malfunctioning.

That is the paradox of this text: Różewicz reads and follows current events, yet he uses them to look into the past and treats the present as a mirror or reflection for the past. This author wants to settle accounts and make sure that the public knows certain details of that which has affected his
public image. There is also a particular urgency linked to clearing up the past in this volume, as
the poet hints that this may be his last attempt at a published work. Therefore, I propose that
Różewicz sets up this mode of revealing secrets as part of the dynamics of his text in a clear
anticipation of readerly judgements and their consequences. When it comes to the damaging
hypocrisy of artists, intellectuals, and institutions, he does not allow ethical ambiguity. He takes
his ideal reader on a mnemonic journey and by exposing us to the textual dynamics of seeking
secrets, simultaneously prompts us to make ethically engaged readerly judgements. Does he want
to implicate his readers in sharing these secrets then? Yes, I argue that most certainly, he does. He
wants his reader to pick a side, and make an ethical choice.

Thus, Różewicz returns to his days as Satyr, the AK soldier, and in doing so this author, known
for his lack of political commentary, takes a politically charged stance about the past. We will
consider if such a clarification of the past is also an attempt at gaining due recognition. The poem
begins with a sarcastic title, “hiobowe wieści ze wszystkich frontów”, which refers to the phrase
“hiobowa wieść” (“Job’s news”) denoting tragic or bad news. The title also points to the Biblical Job,
who was the subject of a bet between God and Satan. Satan’s conviction that Job will curse God
when his family, possessions and livelihood are taken away has not materialized. Deprived of riches,
family, and plagued by leprosy, he nonetheless remained faithful to God, and in return was rewarded
by health, wealth, and progeny. Job, thus, is the Biblical symbol of the virtue of patience.

On the other hand, the phrase “ze wszystkich frontów” bears a double meaning, denoting both
the military “front,” in the sense of “iść na front” (go to the battlefield), and thus news from
all battlefields; and “all fronts,” meaning “all sides” of an issue. The lyrical subject, then, is
announcing the bad news that surrounds him from all sides, including the contemporary battlefield
in Afghanistan. Yet the bad news that follows is often trivial and assessed with sarcastic distance.
Różewicz is commenting on the trivialization of mass media news, which feeds on exposure, gossip,
and sensationalist soundbites. He alludes also to the popular notion that only bad news is worth
reporting in the media; or, perhaps, that that which dominates the media discourse is a “culture of fear.”
The latter term, one popularized by a number of writers and scholars, is a notion whereby, in order
to control society through fear, the media spin certain versions of the news according to a specific
ideology while consciously blurring the lines between fiction and reality. We can think of the culture
of fear promoted by the Bush administration, for example, after the World Trade Center disaster.
One wonders, however, if Różewicz’s Job, who needs to have infinite patience for such “bad” news, is the newspaper-reading general public, the reader of Różewicz’s text, or the implied author himself, who has to deal with this trivialized “white noise” of each day’s events. Will the implied author, like Job, receive his reward, or will his sarcasm prevail, suggesting an ultimate lack of faith in any potential redemption? Or is it that his only redemption or saving grace is, in fact, the healthy distance of sarcasm?

The news story that opens the poem, about the Polish company failing to win a military contract, could be an event from the front page of a newspaper, or a feature story communicated in a news program. It refers to the loss of the PHZ Bumar in their bid for a contract providing military equipment to the Iraqi army. This is a real news story dating back to January 31st of 2004 announcing that Bumar’s offer to supply the equipment for 554 million dollars was bettered by an American contract proposing similar equipment for 327 million. Różewicz may want to scrutinize the ethical implications of Poland profiting from the current US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or he might be reflecting on Poland’s participation in the war in Iraq, in particular those voices claiming that Poland did bad business by joining forces with the United States, yet receiving nothing in return. This military news also provides an effective backdrop to Różewicz’s own combatant past. In short, when we recall Różewicz’s recent poetic volumes dealing with WWII and the Holocaust, *always a fragment: recycling* (1998) and *professor’s knife* (2001), with their prominent theme of gold, recycling, and the profiteering from atrocity, the link to the present is clear. Not only have we not moved beyond such practices, but also wars are a profitable business, and one in which modern nations unashamedly participate.

Next, news of supposedly secondary importance follows: the vandalizing of the Siren sculpture, which is the symbolic marker of Poland’s capital city. The reader learns that a bottle was placed on her head and her saber was twisted and turned into a “pig’s tail.” Since we are reading local news from Warsaw, we also encounter a mention of a play currently being staged in the capital city’s National Theatre. The play is Różewicz’s *Duszyczka* (Little Soul). This news of an autobiographical nature maintains its “time frame” integrity, as it dates to the end of January and early February, in keeping with the previous two news stories. The play, directed by the famed Jerzy Grzegorzewski,
premiered on the 30th of January 2004. The original text, on which Grzegorzewski based his performance, is Różewicz’s prose poema by the same title published in 1977, and earlier poetic fragments from *Et in Arcadia Ego* published in the volume *Głos Anonima* (1961).

What is Różewicz’s motive in mentioning the current staging of his play? *Duszyczka*’s lyrical subject is a consciousness torn between the awareness of lost cultural memory, biological urges of the body, and the inevitable absurdity of death, the lack of trust in and salvation via art. It is noteworthy that this staging of *Duszyczka* (staged in the underground tunnel connecting two scenes of the National Theatre in Warsaw) was a part of a festival, *Planeta Grzegorzewski*, a retrospective of the work of the acclaimed experimental artist and theatre director, Jerzy Grzegorzewski. On one hand, the unconventional staging in the underground tunnel (which resembled a canal devoid of water— a very non-theatrical, unwelcoming, and bare staging, suggests a descent into realms not usually occupied by high culture. On the other hand, accompanying *Duszyczka* on the festival’s bill are works of Polish and international literary giants (among them: staging of Witold Gombrowicz’s *Ślub* (The Wedding) and *Operetka* (Operetta), of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Wesele* (Marriage), *Sędziowie* (Judges) and *Hamlet*, Zygmunt Krasiński’s *Nie-Boska Komedia* (Undivine Comedy), as well as Shakespeare’s *Midsummer night’s dream* and W.H.Auden’s *Sea and the Mirror*. I posit that Różewicz wants his readers to note the company of literary giants that surround his work, and this does possibly unveil the poet’s sense of vulnerability.

Does it matter if the reader recognizes that in *Duszyczka* the hero is confronting death? I posit that Różewicz wants his ideal reader to recognize this thematic parallel between *Duszyczka* and *Kup Kota w Worku*. Różewicz wants his ideal reader to recognize that he himself remains a committed re-reader of his own works who constantly converses with his texts and wishes for a similar attitude towards his works to be adapted by his readers. There is always a secret that remains to be uncovered; there is always a readerly judgement and a claim that needs re-evaluation. That is why *Kup Kota w worku* is deemed an unfinished work, or a work in progress, precisely because the old poet wants his ideal reader to adapt a similar processual praxis of reading and rereading rooted in ethical responsibility.
The reader may ask however, why Różewicz’s *Duszyczka* being “noticed” in a corridor under the National Theatre is also counted among the media stories of bad news? It may be bad news to some, Różewicz implies, as he quickly draws an association with a nameless writer who “was well known from the time of the cult of the individual” (Stalinism). Bringing up his *Duszyczka* in the context of found news reports hints at two things: that Różewicz’s material written in 1977 is still applicable to contemporary reality, that it is current; and moreover, that it still receives stellar reviews. He wants to highlight that he is still alive and well as a writer, still present on the cultural scene; moreover, that his plays are adapted by one of the most experimental artist in Polish theatre (Grzegorzewski). Someone else fighting for success and readership is “a well-known author (!) / from the time period of the cult of individual / wants to be included / in the underground circulation and again / is looking for a loophole too bad / that this comes with a twenty-five years of delay / in relation to colleagues / whose pens have been broken on Mysia street.”57 The Polish reader knows that Mysia Street housed the communist censorship office, and that many writers’ careers were broken by the political system, which demanded, during the communist era, conformity to its rules and regulations. Notice that the well-known author whom the poet mentions remains nameless. Since he was well-known at the time of Stalinism means that he was published and enjoyed the protectorate of the system. His colleagues, on the other hand, chose a different ethical stance, and struggled.

Indirectly, Różewicz is reminding the reader of his own political stance during that time. After he returned from Hungary in 1951, he moved from Kraków to Gliwice, and as Drewnowski puts it, by remaining on the margins and disassociating from the centers of literary life in Poland, he entered a seventeen year period of “Gliwice emigration” in order to protect himself from the pressures of the Stalinist regime. In choosing not to reveal the identity of the author who once again tries to gain notoriety, Różewicz saves this secret only for those of his closest circle, who may know the name of this writer from private conversations with the poet, and thus understand this allusion. Yet, more importantly, it may not be that particular individual who is important here, but rather the phenomenon of disgraceful and harmful opportunism (note the previous example of Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s postwar career). Różewicz joins the discussion about the nature of Communism, what followed from it for individual people, and how we think about it and evaluate these positions now. It is my contention, however, that what is stressed here is also
Róźewicz’s own position at that time, and the triumph of the continued relevance of this work. Simultaneously, the poet exposes his vulnerability, since it is clear he is bothered by those voices who labelled him as the “foremost Stalinist” in Poland.

5.3 The combatant and the combating Róźewicz

Let us now look at Róźewicz’s deep sarcasm about the news stories detailing the fiascos of the Polish army contingent, and what secrets of his own past he reveals against this news backdrop. Reading the daily newspapers is intermittently interrupted by resurfacing memory. We learn that the lyrical subject was so overwhelmed by the noise of information (“szum informacyjny”) that he missed the news about the World Day of Peace, as well as the bad news, here ironically termed “Job’s news,” that soldiers of the “exquisite” Polish Army were playing with weapons, and one accidently shot another twice in the head. This announcement is followed by a biographical memory of the young Róźewicz from before the war: “after all, already in 1938 / we were taught during a military tactics course / that even an unloaded weapon / should be held with its barrel down / or up / since as the sergeant said / ‘if God will allow / he can fire even from a stick…” What is the point of this sneering ridicule, the reader may ask? Is Róźewicz’s aim to simply highlight the incompetence of the soldiers of the Polish Army?

I think there is a deeper purpose than ridicule here. Róźewicz recounts another shooting accident, this time in the Special Brigade forces of the Polish army: “here again bad news from the battlefield / our boy from a special brigade / shot himself in a toe / (unfortunately the ministry of defence / did not disclose if it was his left or right foot).” These somewhat ridiculous reports of shooting accidents serve as build-up to the poet’s biographical memory, and yet another secret that the author fails to disclose. This is another instance where Róźewicz chooses to ridicule and expose a situation, allude to the circumstances of his own stance, and yet withhold the identity of the mocked individual. The writer returns to the time of his youth as a Home Army soldier and takes on the persona of an old combatant to bring in not only the history of AK youth, but also question the treatment and assessment of the underground army by the Communist regime in Poland after the war. He reminisces:
I recall that in 1944, despite the lack of ammunition in the action called ‘Tempest’ (Burza), the soldier ‘Szczerbaty’ shot himself in a foot after forty years he was nominated for a lieutenant; he received a high order (perhaps it was the cross of valour!?) finally he became a chairman of the international combatants’ order; since ‘Szczerbaty’ remembered that I remember he began to slander me (...), but this is yet another story.

The circle closest to Różewicz would surely know the identity of the soldier under the pseudonym “Szczerbaty”, who later on received accolades for his “heroic” injury and performance. The reader is meant to understand only the broad political context of the situation, and compare the positions of the people involved, namely that of Różewicz himself and his colleague from the army days, but also the broader context of implications behind the military operation dubbed “action Tempest.” “Tempest” was designed as a series of uprisings conducted by the Polish resistance (the Home Army) between January 1944 and January 1945, aimed at seizing control of cities under German occupation. Polish government in exile wanted to take power over these areas before the arrival of the Soviet Red Army and its entrance into occupied Poland. Since diplomatic relations between Poland and the Soviet Union were broken and did not resumed before the Soviets entered Poland, the Polish government in exile issued directives for the Home Army soldiers to remain underground. The Home Army’s commander on the ground however, ordered the Polish resistance army’s tactical collaboration with the Soviet forces. As a result, the Polish Home Army soldiers were betrayed by the Soviet forces (they were largely taken prisoner and given a choice of either joining the Red Army or being sent to Soviet labour camps. Since Różewicz aims to bring to light both the personal and the historical while simultaneously commenting on the mythicization of events and biographies, his ironic stance towards Szczerbaty’s heroics is blatantly clear. The lyrical subject mocks that during an ammunition shortage, the soldier shot himself in the toe, and later received a prestigious military order for his heroics. The significance behind Szczerbaty’s military award, and his position as a chairman of the “wszechświatowego związku bojowników” (universal alliance of fighters) can be understood by the Polish reader familiar with postwar history. One can gather that the combatant organization Różewicz refers to is ZBOWID (then named “Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację”) Alliance of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy), renamed “Związek Kombatantów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Byłych Więźniów Politycznych” (The Combatants' Alliance of the Polish Republic and Former Political Prisoners). Prior to 1990, this organization was politically subordinate to
PZPR (Polish United Workers’ Party). Due to a lack of more specific information, however, the reader, despite numerous investigative research attempts, is not able to decipher the riddle as to the identity of Różewicz’s adversary. For political reasons, some soldiers of the underground Home Army were not admitted to this organization; and some of them, for these same reasons, did not want to be a part of it. The 1950s and 60s were marked by a surge of willing combatants who wanted its membership due to a series of benefits that it offered. These perks included, for example, financial bonuses, a discount on public transportation, and reduced rates or even exemptions from car insurance. Thus, political officers who worked under the auspices of the Soviet Union, members of UB (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa), were also a part of this organization. Here, Różewicz once again highlights his political past. In closing of this poem, he remarks, seemingly nonchalantly: “(…) during an underground course / Home Army infantry cadets / in Radomsko region – after / the completion of the course I received / a rank of corporal cadet // (which was annulled in the period / of ‘cult of the individual’ …) etc. etc.” Not only was he stripped of his rank during Stalinism, but he also did not belong to a combatant association that could offer him significant benefits. How could he be, then, the chief Stalinist in Poland, one should ask? In my view, despite numerous awards and recognition received in the 1990s and 2000s, Różewicz still remembers the defamation of character he suffered at the hands of his adversaries and the stain that this placed on his public image. He tirelessly, if seemingly nonchalantly, tackles this issue and longs to set right the accounts of the past even though he realizes that some may never be set right since the injustice, damage done, and time cannot be reversed.

Another example of Różewicz’s resentful stance with regards to falsified individual memory but also its ambiguities, gray areas and legacy pertains to the public opinion and treatment of his contemporary, Tadeusz Borowski. Best known in the English-speaking world for his short stories about Auschwitz, This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman (1948), Borowski’s oeuvre received a negative critical reception twice in Poland: first, immediately after the war; and later, again, in the 1970s, years after his death. In the context of Polish criticism, this negative critical reception is known as “the issue of Borowski.” The reasons why are far too complex to be here delved into in detail, but for the sake of my argument, it suffices to say that Borowski was attacked by both Catholic and Marxist critics for his short stories, which tackled a simplified and stereotypical view of war and the Holocaust, the romantic cult of heroism and martyrology. They
also demanded from writers, in an attempt at coming closer to the truth, a re-evaluation of literary techniques and poetics in the post-war reality. Still, in the mid-1990s, when classifying Polish post-war literature based on the criteria of its stance towards European culture and its values/ethics, Krzysztof Pomian placed Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Czesław Miłosz, and Zbigniew Herbert on one side, the positive one, of the spectrum, and Borowski and Różewicz on the other. Both Borowski and Różewicz, in the past, have been labelled as nihilists. Prior to Borowski’s tragic suicide in 1951 the two poets were friends, and Różewicz at times spoke of their intellectual connection. Here, Różewicz is vexed by and speaks out against the behaviour of Polish intellectuals, writers, and critics, including contemporaries of both the Stalinist and post-Stalinist era. He did just that in his poem “Kryształowe wnętrze brudnego człowieka” (“A crystal inner-self of a dirty man”) which was a response to Adam Ważyk’s “Poemat dla dorosłych” (“A poem for Adults”) published in 1955. In his poem-caricature, Różewicz writes: “I murdered the innocent / yet my knife / was clean (“Zarzynalem niewinnych / lecz nóż mój / był czysty jak lza”), since he cannot believe Ważyk’s miraculous ideological metamorphosis and the ridiculous popularity of the poem in which he renounced Stalinism. Most critics, including such renowned scholar as Kazimierz Wyka, did not understand the poem. Thus, Różewicz complains:

The poem “Crystal inner-self of a dirty man” was about the poet Ważyk and others, who were activists- it is a parody poem. Meanwhile Professor Wyka took this poem as an autobiographical one (!!), for an excellent (!) lyrical piece. My God, this is a mockery! Isn’t joking allowed? Do scholars have to take a mockery for lyricism etc. A comedy of errors. And such is the case with many of my works. Almost no one deciphered the mockery hidden therein.

Speaking of similar ideological metamorphoses among other writers, Różewicz says: “Now they count Kott, Ważyk, Andrzejewski as ‘moralists’, the ones who started the protest etc. This would have been funny, if it wasn’t so sad.” In 1949, the poet wrote a poem entitled “Elegia prowincjonalna” (“Provincial elegy”) in which he expresses his own post-war position: he titles one part of the poem “Uliczka kota w worku” (“Side street of pig in a poke”) and characterizes it as “… a street without arms / and legs without a head” (“... to jest uliczka bez rąk /i nóg uliczka bez głowy.”) Not a single one of his critics, Różewicz asserts, understood this poem correctly, except his contemporary, Borowski:

No one understood this poema. But this “side street without arms and legs a street
without head”, “street of a pig in a poke” – all of it is autobiography. In Elegy especially... I wrote my own situation, which already in the years 1948-49 seemed to me as such... Not one critic deciphered that. After the publication of the piece, I received a letter from T. Borowski. He understood the poem. Besides, he could understand it.  

Expressing his deep disappointment with not being understood by critics, but more importantly, by the ideological betrayal and overwhelming hypocrisy of his fellow literati, he once again comments about the unjust treatment of the memory of his colleague, Borowski: “(...) [i]n Warsaw colleagues tell me that T.B. was an informer. If from the poorest and the most talented they were able to make a rag … God, take pity on him, he was and remained clean. And the literary heap of dung steams still between Krakowskie Przedmieście and Wiejska, in ‘Kameralna’ and ‘Spatif.’” Clearly, Różewicz was wrong here, as Tadeusz Borowski did indeed become an agent, so he did not remain “pure.” I propose, however that Różewicz’s antagonistic stance towards the literary community expressed in the above citation is fitting with his lifelong animosity towards it. Moreover, I suggest that it is Borowski’s tragic suicide that may prevent Różewicz from judging him harshly and in effect protecting his good name. It is widely assumed that Borowski’s suicide was a result of his disillusionment with the regime, and as such Różewicz may be observing a certain sense of responsibility to the dead whom he considers to be, at least in part, also victims.

Hence, once again, Różewicz returns to that “Uliczka kota w worku” (“Side street of a pig in a poke”) from 1949, this time with the twist of a marketing ploy, implicit in the imperative of the title “kup kota w worku.” It is vital to note that the volume Kup kota w worku (work in progress) is intentionally dated by the poet 1950-2008 and that in it poet once again returns to the poems of his poetic debut, Anxiety (1947). He also alludes, however, to the return to the Provincial Elegy and its “Uliczka kota w worku,” hinting at being misunderstood. Perhaps Różewicz suggests that despite the accolades he received in the 1990s, the lack of understanding of his works is still pervasive and as a consequence his situation as a poet within the literary market is still precarious. Perhaps this could be read as an allusion to the post-war reality of writing poetry, when the ethical compass had already crumbled, in comparison to writing poetry in contemporary times of relativism of values and ethics. Różewicz instructs that from the garbage heap of print news, from the unceasing babble of the TV and radio, his ideal reader must re-read
and thus slow down the galloping consumption of information in order to re-think the facts we are being fed. Perhaps the poet’s voracious reading of news from a variety of sources has a similar purpose—to attempt to sift through mass of often incongruous information in order to construct some version of reality of events for himself. He asks his ideal reader to critically engage with all texts, the ones of popular culture and his own. Perhaps then his readers will transgress the negative reviews, which label the present volume as “babble,” and instead see the vulnerability of an old poet who still struggles with the past, his own public image, and the injustice suffered by those who can no longer speak.

What is Różewicz’s motive for implicating his modern day reader in the secrets of the past? I contend that he wants his reader to re-read in order to make connections and to notice the hypocrisy of intellectuals, systems and institutions. Różewicz calls for ethical responsibility for the word (written, read, and spoken on the public forum) and the “further act of language” which not only shapes the reception of a text, i.e. its interpretation / reading, but also further shapes the careers and reputations of writers. He expects his readers to understand and expose fabrications, hypocrisies, half-truths. *Kup kota w worku* is a text that is a riddle / puzzle which must be re-read to understand why Różewicz bombards us with the infantile monologues of the pseudo-literati and the “bad news” recounted by multifarious media sources. Różewicz wants an ethically engaged model of reading praxis as he shows that its lack has grave consequences—it results not only in the misreading / misinterpretation of the text, but damages careers, reputations, and legacies. In other words, it impacts individual lives. The writer, however, activates a meta-communicative level of sharing secrets, which shows that some secrets must remain hidden. We see that Różewicz deliberately withholds some information (and as a result protects certain private individuals whom he nevertheless regards with animosity), yet he double-codes these secrets so that they may be available to the privileged few. Thus, the poet does implicate his readers in “secret sharing”—reading and responsibility for the text pronounced and read are a part of the “conduct of one’s life” as Miller would have it. The readers of *Kup kota w worku* are faced with a clear choice of alternatives or reading models: remain readers at the level of the self-indulgent, naïve, uneducated, uncritical monologist which he parodies in the volume’s opening, or be an axiologically and ethically engaged reader whose understanding of reality and texts is based on a committed dialogue with the voices/ perspectives s/he encounters. This model
of an engaged reading praxis based on dialogue has a clear ethical dimension and demands a responsible “further act of language” which carries the act of private reading into the public sphere of exchange. It is this talking about a work/text, writing about it, or teaching it, which can shape not only reader’s intellectual development and understanding of the world, but also a writer’s reception, career and legacy. Thus, Różewicz asks for an ethical commitment from his audience that would equal his own. Then his work/texts may have a chance of withstanding the popular culture’s media noise and textual chaos that often brings about trivialization of issues, and with it, lack of responsible, committed engagement.

6 Credo: contemporary “patronage” of the arts and the role of poetry

6.1 Marketing photographs and illustrations: blurring the lines between the private and the public

When one thinks of a writer’s public image, one considers not only the works and public statements of the persona in question, but also a certain physical presence. This is frequently an image created, sometimes deliberately, sometimes not, in the public’s imagination, through years of photographs, and public appearances. In the Polish context, one can think of Wisława Szymborka’s black formal dress at the Nobel presentation, and her quiet elegance, associated with everyday objects like teacups, and the postcard collages she painstakingly collected and created for her closest friends, as well as the library-like atmosphere of her Kraków apartment; one can think of the image of Miron Białoszewski photographed with a characteristic buttoned up shirt collar; of Tymoteusz Karpowicz photographed in an informal, big wool sweater on the back cover of his volume Sloje zadrzewne (Tree Rings) (1999); and finally of Różewicz, a short, gray haired man in glasses, wearing a dress shirt and buttoned cardigan, a gentleman’s hat that had become popular again in the 1990s among the older generation, and an informal jacket. We can think of the image of Różewicz posing on the cover of his volume Zawsze fragment recycling (1996), lifting the cover of a garbage receptacle; of his whimsical portrait with a
sculpture of a pig in the streets of the Wrocław market; finally of the small figure of the poet with the enormous towering sculpture of Pope Pius X in his volume Szara strefa (2002). One also cannot forget Różewicz’s self-stylization as a “poet emeritus” which may have begun with his famous poem of that title dedicated to Czesław Miłosz. For those among the public who have seen the four films by Andrzej Sapija about Różewicz one also needs to take into account the images introduced into the popular imagination by these documentaries. This is where, in my opinion, the question of marketability and vulnerability as a tactic comes in. We, the readers, perceive Różewicz, the person, in some way, and our perception is based on the visual representations of him that we have encountered. As readers, we are aware that Różewicz, with an academic background and lifelong fascination with art history, is also as careful a reader of images as he is of texts. To some extent his photographs show us the person the way he is: the way he dresses, walks, smiles, positions his body to pose for a photograph; yet we should not forget that all these images were specifically chosen as illustrations for particular volumes of his work. The poet is very much aware of a certain image the reader will encounter, and although there may be a dissonance with the image of the poet we confront in his texts, both are constructed, deliberate images, with which he wants the reader to remain. The reader notes a certain paradox in this marketing strategy as Różewicz, on the one hand, is considered to be a very private poet who eludes interviews and exposure, but on the other hand, here poses for the camera to proliferate a certain image of himself. Paradoxically, while usually shunning contemporary popular culture, which thrives on public exposure and the marketing of the private (as demonstrated by social networking sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn; TV ‘reality’ shows such as Big Brother, Survivor, Teen mom, and countless others; and whole conglomerates of media devoted to celebrity gossip, etc.), Różewicz also markets his image for public consumption as a means of promotion of his work.

The illustrations on the cover and within this volume (comprised of the author’s humorous, child-like pen drawings) serve a similar function. The analysis of illustrations lies beyond the scope of my chapter; here, I only want to point out that they may be seen as a marketing ploy, and that Różewicz, in displaying these drawings, indeed conforms to the demands of the current literary market. On the cover of the volume the reader encounters an image of a white sheet of
paper (positioned askew as if it was accidentally dropped onto the cover) with the author’s pen
and marker drawings and handwritten text. The drawings depict three sacks: one tied, yet
showing a red cat inside, another blacked over and with a question mark above it, the third with
two feet and two cat’s heads peering out of the top. The phrases written at the top of the page are:
“300 worków – zbyt duża dekoracja, koszta”, “30 worków – (możliwe na dużej scenie)”, “3 worki
(w sam raz dla teatru ubogiego) (300 sacks – scenery and costs are too large” , 30 sacks –
(possible on a big scene)”, “3 sacks (fitting for a poor theatre).” The first two phrases are crossed
out, with a hand-written signature (legible as the first and last name of the poet) written in green
marker that partially overlaps the abovementioned text. Below the drawings, we have circled
phrases: “project scenografii do sztuki kot w worku” (“project of scenography for a play kot
(pig) in a poke”) and “work in progress,” the first phrase having been crossed out. Finally, at the
very bottom of the page, “Kup kota w Worku!” (“Buy a pig in a poke”) is written, this time in
navy marker.

Różewicz wants his readers to be amused and intrigued by this cover design. It is clear that these
drawings are not aimed to evoke aesthetic pleasure; they are of the category of private doodle
which anyone of us might reserve for their private notes/ diary/ agenda. Does Różewicz want the
reader to speculate over whether if, in fact, the content of this volume will someday appear on
stage? Is the poet conceiving of this volume as a performance piece? It seems that since the
phrase “projekt sztuki…” (“project of a play”) is crossed out, the author has given up on the idea,
yet leaving the crossed out text on the page only heightens the idea of an undisclosed secret.

I would like to briefly turn to another amusing illustration, this time within the pages of the
volume, which I chose to further highlight the marketing tactic of blurring the lines between the
public and private. Page 43 of the volume contains a facsimile of a candy wrapper (the producer
is the Polish company Goplana, and the text on the wrapper informs us that the candy is called
“Makbet arachidowy”(peanut Macbeth), a part of the “Mieszanka teatralna”(Theatre mix series).
Above the wrapper, Różewicz titles the page with the handwritten phrase “Moja inscenizacja Makbeta”
(“My staging of Macbeth”); below this, the reader sees another phrase, starting with the word,
“czyli” (“that is”). There is more text, but it is crossed out and blacked over, making it completely
unreadable. Naturally, Różewicz is being playful here, seemingly making a ready-made artwork
out of a candy wrapper. Both the illustration on the volume’s cover and this one, within the volume, make playful reference to the fact that Różewicz always identifies himself equally as a poet and a dramatist; drama is an inherent part of the writer’s oeuvre. Once again, just like on the cover, Różewicz lets the reader into what seems like a world of private notebooks, doodles, and jokes. The wrapper, stretched out and pressed onto a page, echoes a very private bookmark, one jury-rigged in an instant while reading and eating candy. Moreover, a candy named “Macbeth” featured along others named “Hamlet”, “Ophelia”, “Othello”, “Petruccio” or “Desdemona” (hallmarks of Shakespeare’s bloody tragedies) in a candy mix collection named “theatre mix” by the Polish producer Goplana is simultaneously preposterous, idiotic, and funny. Różewicz draws the reader’s attention to such absurd commercialization of high art. The implication is that perhaps one day, we may be able to partake in a package of candy with, for example “The Card Index”, or “Bite the Dust” alongside “The Dead Class” or “Tango” in “The Polish theatre” candy mix. However, Różewicz is not immune from commercialism in this volume. The candy wrapper is meant for public consumption and as such it may be a little taste of the private, which is deliberately staged as to become the public. It is meant to make the reader smile in recognition that we all at times endulge our sweet tooth while reading; moreover, that we share the commonality of Goplana’s chocolates with the poet. No doubt, the wrapper itself is constitutive of a marketing tactic, as it simultaneously evades and conforms to the idea of the public exposure of the private.

6.2 Cultural competence: seeking truth, seeking gold

After showing (in the opening prose section of the volume, “push girl push”) his reader the consciousness of a young pseudo-literati as the quintessential consumer of pop culture, and after contrasting this consciousness with his own critical and ironic processing of media news as an elderly intellectual (in “Job’s news on all fronts”) Różewicz unveils his “Credo”, at the end of the volume. “Przyj” in Polish is a common urge used for women in labour, moreover its pairing with the word “dziewczę” (specific diminutive for ‘girl’ denoting a young, perhaps inexperienced, or naive girl) signals Różewicz’s pejoratory attitude to the woman author and her creativity. The “birthing” of her work of art implies a painstaking action linked to biological activity and an
unescapable urge, rather than art that is linked to the processes of reason and thought. The authorial strategy which Różewicz adapts in this poem is that of assessing and explicating the ethical project inherent in his poetry; thus, at the heart of his “Credo” lies the question of ethics. In this poem, he assesses the mission of his poetry vis-à-vis popular culture and its contemporary literary market. Also, Różewicz addresses key issues which shape his reality as an active, publishing poet: the sponsorship of the arts, which he ironically terms “mecenat” (patronage), and his philosophical position as to the role and function of poetry. Moreover, he sees his poetic credo as a statement that must address these issues since they lie at the center of his self-definition as a poet. I should highlight that “Credo” may come as a surprise to the reader of *Kup kota w worku* (*work in progress*), since one does not expect an artist’s credo to appear in a volume that is dominated by satire and parody. Nonetheless, Różewicz places this poem near the end of the volume perhaps in order to highlight its importance as a take away message for the reader.

The poem has three sections titled: 1) “nadchodzi” (approaching), 2) “złota cegła” (gold brick), and 3) “poszukiwacze złota piękna i prawdy” (seekers of gold, beauty, and truth). These, together, showcase the poet’s perspective on the current artistic / literary cultural scene, on the production and reception of art, and finally, on Różewicz’s own understanding of his mission as a writer. The text begins with an epigram, a citation from Martin Heidegger’s *Vom Wessen der Wahrheit* (“The Essence of Truth”) lecture (1933). The epigram should normally illuminate the meaning of the poem; yet since it appears in the original German, it is also an obstacle for the modern reader, who unlike the classically educated readers of older generations, may not be fluent in many foreign languages. Readers with no knowledge of German will need to consult the text of Heidegger’s lecture in translation. Moreover, Heidegger is a demanding philosopher even to those fluent in the German language. Thus, opening with a citation from Heidegger points to Różewicz raising the stakes for his reader (especially in comparison to the opening text). The epigraph from Heidegger reads:

> The true is the actual. Accordingly, we speak of true gold in distinction from false. It is merely a ‘semblance’ and thus is not actual. What is not actual is taken to be the opposite of the actual. But what merely seems to be gold is nevertheless something actual. Accordingly, we say more precisely: actual gold is genuine gold. Yet both are ‘actual’, the circulating counterfeit no less than the genuine gold.69

![Image](image-url)
Addressing the relationship between the actual and the false, the real and the counterfeit, the epigraph captures these issues on multiple levels: the falsity behind the sponsorship of the arts, the false motivation of pseudo-artists producing kitsch for a chance at commercial success, the falseness of fame and recognition, the danger of falsified history and memory, and finally the philosophical question of the distrust of language’s ability to represent reality.

The sponsorship of the arts is personified here as an evil “Sponsor Mecenas”, which approaches like an apocalypse. This persona wears all the accessories of a deceitful bandit, a masque, a hood, a face-covering robber’s hat, and is described as a “Godfather.” The reader immediately connects this image with the mafia trope made prominent in our popular imagination by the blockbuster film series, The Godfather. This sponsor is also described as “the Prince of the World” (“Książę tego świata”), a common expression denoting Satan. Two verses later, however, this figure is ironically called “dobrodziej” (“benefactor”) who throws awards into hats, berets, and cylinders. The distributed awards have no merit; there is no difference between large, small, prestigious, and shoddy awards (“wielką małą albo inną / byle jaką prestiżową”). All of them are simply an offensive, superfluous aggregate described as a “crumb from the lord’s table / a fraction of a percentage” (“okruch z pańskiego stołu / ułamek procenta”). The disparity of remuneration for literati versus authors of mainstream popular bestsellers and blockbuster films is highlighted with biting ironic comparison:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a penny for a novelist} & \quad \text{a penny for a poet martyr} & \quad \text{a singing fool} & \quad \text{in the fiery oven of censorship} \\
\text{three pennies from the goddess of victory} & \quad \text{from petrarch from herder} & \quad \text{from goethe and büchner} & \quad \text{for a mutt and homer} \\
\text{three oscars for King-Kong} & \quad \text{for harrypoter}. & & \\
\end{align*}
\]

The profession of a writer or poet does not inspire financial success. In fact popular bestseller fiction, of the merits of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter saga, turned into a series of Hollywood movies, is what guarantees a writer both notoriety and financial accolades. Those who do not know how to benefit from the success and profits of popular culture are the laughable outcasts: poets described as “martyr(s) [and] singing fools” of which he himself is one. The lyrical subject inscribes himself in a certain commonality of “we”—the artists or people who survived the war and post-war Stalinist censorship, in contradistinction to those who now, despite being placed on a “pedestal” of recognition, in fact assume the role of beggars: “we sit on the parnassus
show scabs stumps cuts scars / (the ones suffered for the motherland and the ones attained from her) / we squat under the walls of churches banks / by the cemetery gates / by crematoria / walls of death / we sit in uniform helmets / in blood-socked museum garb / in striped uniform of prisoners and in coat tails / theatrical costumes.”

The irony here of having attained the stature of chosen ones who are recognized as worthy of the gods (i.e., are seated on a Parnassus), yet in reality are nothing more than beggars, is quite poignant. Inscribing himself within the common “we”, Różewicz refers to a generational experience of those who having survived the war (hence, references to military attire, helmets, concentration camp prisoners’ garb, and blood stained rags), who have both fought for the homeland and received deadly wounds from it. It should be noted that Home Army soldiers were imprisoned and murdered by the official Communist regime after it seized power in Poland in 1945, an entity which at one time was a military ally (the Communist Soviet Union) now becoming also new ideological enemy. However, that experience, nowadays, belongs to a very distant past as historical events have entered the institutionalized context of memory preserved either in museum exhibitions or in the performed memory captured via theatrical performance. This is why the combatant’s clothes are referred to as “museum rags” and “theatrical costumes.” The stories which were part of the life experience for this generation of poets and artists now can be accessed mostly only through such institutional intermediaries, the truth of their experience thus mediated according to institutional ideologies. Frequently, the people whose whole lives have been defined by the tragic experiences of war and postwar betrayals, are perceived by the young generation as “museum objects,” distant and thus barely real.

Both institutional memory and art are controlled by special interest groups who sponsor culture and fund and control media. This group is described as “producers of radiation induced death / (...) producers of fear / Sponsors of high culture / from the bottom shelf.” Here again, Różewicz alludes to the media’s “culture of fear,” calling the groups who control media “producers of radiation induced death.” This invokes once more George W. Bush’s “war on terror,” which in the official media was presented as an attempt to dismantle the imminent threat of terrorism post 9/11. This narrative of fear played a role in justifying the consequent military campaigns in Afganistan and Iraq. Also, the abovementioned phrase plays on a combination of allusions—the aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bomb as well as rays emitted by TV sets.
The deadly effects of the latter are intellectual, perhaps even spiritual, rather than physical, but still affect massive numbers of people who consume TV programming with no “filters” of critical attention.

According to the lyrical subject, it is these same interest groups, those who push the culture of fear, who fund media and sponsor culture, a fact which he mocks as “kultur[a] wysok[a] z niskiej półki” (“high culture from the bottom shelf”). These sponsors of culture also give out awards to the ones who are the “favourites of the gods.” However these are meaningless awards that may be forced upon recipients as unwanted laurels (“wciskają na głowę laury”). Różewicz implies that the functioning of contemporary culture, starting with who controls it, who and what receives recognition, and what works pretend to the status of high art is, in fact, a parody of reason and common sense. Polish culture and its literary market still operate within the dialectic of “us versus them,” since it is the evil and all-powerful “them” who “sucked the soul and mind out of us” (“wyssały z nas duszę rozum”), so much so that “throughout the entire year / carnival attire is compulsory” (“przez rok cały rok okrąży / obowiązuje strój karnawałowy”). The present reality is akin to Rabelais’ carnivalesque, where the pauper is the king and the normal hierarchies are reversed; now, however, the carnival is present throughout the year. I think this “carnivalesque” of the open competitive literary market reminds Różewicz of the mechanisms of culture and its promotion during the “cult of the individual” of Stalinist times. At that time, those who sang the praises of the regime were rewarded with publication and accolades; now, those who align their works with the public’s popular taste, or who can create media hype and use its promotion to their advantage, emerge on top of literary rankings and sales. Nowadays we have a “cult of loud media personality;” thus, we have Różewicz tongue-in-cheek claim that it would be beneficial to be a little “crazy, a bit schizophrenic, a bit gay” (“malowniczego szalonego / (troche) schizofrenika troche kochającego / inaczej”).

Yet simultaneously, Różewicz questions the value of monetary success. In the section of the poem titled “gold brick” (“złota cegła”) the lyrical subject adapts a prophetic tone and in a parable-like manner preaches to the reader about the illusory value of money. The section begins with a biblically inspired call: “people! people! // whoever has ears let them hear / you’ll not drink / gas or oil” (“ludzie! ludzie! // kto ma uszy ku słuchaniu / niechaj słucha / ani ropy ani...”)
The phrase: “whoever has ears, let them hear…” is repeated many times in the New Testament, most notably in Matthew 13:10-13:15. Jesus uses the parable of the sower and different types of soil speaking of God’s word addressed to man. People listen, yet they do not hear; or, they hear but do not understand. This predicament seems to echo in Różewicz’s warning as well. The poet appeals to reason: “whoever has ears / let them listen to the rustle of reed / the thinking reed / Man” (“któ ma uszy do słuchania / niech słucha szmeru trzciny / trzciny myślącej / Człowieka”). There is not much hope in reason, however, as the lyrical subject recounts the current status quo: “Alan Midas Greens Pan Wolf and Wic / Mr. Barrel of Oil and Harry Potter / rule the globe / the Golden Calf quenches thirst / with black gold / Alan writes a bestseller in a bathtub / prophesizes the Black Thursday / of 1929 when / the Great Crisis began.” Alluding to Pascal, the French Baroque philosopher who asserted a belief in human reason, calling man feeble, though a “thinking reed”, Różewicz suggests that truth needs not only reason, but also quiet, and it may drowned out by the loud noise of media culture. It is profit rather than reason or understanding that satiates human thirst as “the Golden Calf quenches thirst / with black gold.” The Biblical Golden Calf, a false idol built according to the wishes of the Israelites during Moses’s absence, is nowadays replaced by oil.

Różewicz wants to engage his reader here in a slow reading of deciphering allusions. Thus, mentioning Alan Greenspan, he expects his ideal reader to recall the Chief of the Federal Reserve, who in 1987 prevented the stock market crash from spiraling into a much worse situation, presided over a long financial and economic boom in the 1990s, only to be discredited by his disdain for regulation, which is now seen as the leading cause of the mortgage crisis of the late 2000s. The reference to “Black Thursday” of 1929 denotes the most serious stock market crash on Wall Street in the history of the United States, the starting point of the ten-year long Great Depression. However, other references made here are more difficult to decipher. We learn that the famed writer by the first name Alan, who supposedly wrote a bestseller in a bathtub, is in fact the already mentioned Alan Greenspan, who in 2007 wrote his memoirs, The Age of Turbulence. Greenspan allegedly penned large parts of the 531-page manuscript of his book in longhand while sitting in the bathtub (a daily practice he started after a back injury in the 1960s). His memoirs, however, given their date of publication, and the fact that Greenspan was born in 1926, could not have predicted the Black Thursday of 1929. This textual secret leads the
reader, perhaps purposely, astray. Róźewicz picks up on the somewhat trivial, gossip-like detail that Greenspan wrote in a bathtub perhaps to build on intertextual allusions. Greenspan here joins such famous figures as the French journalist revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat, portrayed as dying in the bathtub by Jacques-Louis David in his painting “Death of Marat” (1793) (an iconic image within art history), or Victor Hugo, who famously wrote sitting in a bathtub.

Róźewicz continues to test his readers’ cultural competence in the last section of the poem alluding to a famous novel by the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, Ferdydurke (1937). This volume details the experiences of a thirty year old hero, Józio, who is turned into a teenager and “tortured” by questions from his old teacher, Professor Pimko. This is an ironic allusion, as earlier in the volume Róźewicz lamented that it is now five year olds who read Gombrowicz, while teenagers do not read at all. Pimko questions the hero on famous Polish literary and historical figures (Jan Kasprowicz, Joachim Lelewel) and establishes that he needs to return to school to supplement his gaps in education. Róźewicz alludes also to the book of Exodus, where Moses hears God’s voice from a burning bush. Here, however, those two intertexts are conflated into one, as the hero with the same first name as Róźewicz hears the teacher’s voice from a lilac bush: “Tadziu you’ll not grow up to be anything / I hear a voice from a lilac bush / tell me boy / what is FED / I don’t know / and what is Wall Street / and do you know what is Dow / I don’t know but Wall Street / that is a street in America! / but who discovered America / it wasn’t me, professor.” Róźewicz’s young hero, like Gombrowicz’s Józio, demonstrates a similar lack of knowledge and seems threatened by the examiner. The author plays a double entendre on the phrase: “odkryć Amerykę” (to discover America), which in Polish is an idiom used in the ironic sense of making a discovery of something that is common knowledge. In the context of school, the pupil could have been asked a historical question about Columbus, yet he understands its sense as an idiom, which brings humor to the end of this concluding verse. It is noteworthy that Róźewicz, possibly ironically, comments on what constitutes knowledge nowadays (an assessment on what makes a person knowledgeable and what makes one appear ignorant). One wonders if by the two phrases which open and close this stanza: “Tadziu you’ll not grow up to be anything” and “but who discovered America / it wasn’t me, professor”, Róźewicz is ironically alluding to his position within Polish literature as an innovator, yet also to the unprofitable nature of his choice of vocation. Is the reader in his/her own mind supposed to counter the first phrase
with: “Tadeusz Różewicz is a great poet?” If anything like that crosses the reader’s mind, we are in fact caught in an inside joke. Some Polish readers will remember that in Gombrowicz, during a lesson on Polish literature, professor Bladaczka lectures on the Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki and demands from his pupils to repeat “Słowacki was a great poet”\textsuperscript{82}, without giving any further explication of this assertion. He wants the students to unquestioningly commit this phrase to memory. No doubt, Słowacki was a great Polish Romantic poet, yet this phrase is famous in the Polish language as a reference to a style of education that relies on blind repetition of material, lacking any critical reflection and evaluation. Różewicz plays an intertextual game of associations with the reader, and demands far more recognition and understanding of who he is as a literati and what his oeuvre stands for, than a superficial, rehearsed phrase.

6.3 Last words… legacy or what remains

In the last section of “Credo” titled “seekers of gold beauty and truth”, Różewicz retraces his road as a poet since the publication of his first poems in 1938 onwards and presents a view of his poetic quest in a post-Holocaust world. The trauma of WWII defined his poetic volume, appropriately titled \textit{Anxiety} (1947), and its impact never came to be separated from his oeuvre overall. This last section of the poem returns to the already mentioned epigraph (the citation from Heidegger’s \textit{Vom Wessen der Wahrheit} (“The Essence of Truth”, 1933)) as it brings together the quest of seeking the Platonic virtues of truth and beauty, by means of the metaphor of gold. For Heidegger, gold serves as an illustration of the deficiency of logos, to capture the dual existence of both the ‘real’ and the ‘true.’ Różewicz maintains that the world after Auschwitz is characterized by difficult, brutal truths, which time and time again become intentionally muddled. He contends: “the greatest truth of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century / and the greatest secret is THIS / that there is no truth / real world / was stolen from people / and gods / in its place the Prince of this world / planted for the last man / a false world / dripping with gold blood oil.”\textsuperscript{83} The liquid gold which covers the world here together with blood and puss is none other than a reference to the “gold” which together with “Moda” (Fashion) and “Mięso” (Meat) comprised the three sections of his poem \textit{recycling}. In \textit{recycling}, Różewicz, the consummate humanist, returns to the topic of the Holocaust. This is one theme that haunts Różewicz over and over again. Despite the
gold of Holocaust victims stored in Swiss banks, the repeated phrase “Holocaustu przecież nie było” (“but there was no Holocaust”) still reverberates in print and spoken discourse.

Furthermore, keeping in mind the profits obtained from the current wars in Afganistan and Iraq, as well as other wars and genocides throughout the world, we haven’t learnt anything as a society; indeed, we are still acting as if there was no Holocaust. Although critics have asserted that Różewicz already left his phase of “witnessing” behind, my contention is different. I claim that in his rereading and re-writing his own and others’ texts, Różewicz still fights for the preservation of historical truth and memory. He speaks out against injustice, the complacency of remembering, and against false historical records.

I will briefly turn to Heidegger to show that the epigraph adopted by Różewicz for his poem “Credo” can be understood not only as referring to the seeking of truth, but also as a metaphor for reading. Here we should also note Różewicz’s problematic relationship with Heidegger in terms of the philosopher’s ethical stance. Heidegger, in his 1933 lecture on The Essence of Truth, asserts the ambiguity between truth as a property of things and truth as representations of things. He stresses the questionable nature of the essence of truth as correspondence, and illustrates it by exploring Plato’s Allegory of the Cave from the Republic. We need to note here that the Greek language uses the word form “a-letheia”, or “un-concealedness” to name “truth.”

Heidegger outlines four stages involved in our preparation to apprehend things in their unhiddenness (reality, truth). In the first stage, the prisoners in the cave are forced to see only shadows, yet they cannot recognize them as shadows because they have no relationship yet to the objects and light that produce the shadows. Thus they have no relationship to themselves as perceivers; Heidegger argues that this stage is the everyday situation of man. In the second stage, prisoners turn and see the objects, but still perceive the shadows as more unhidden, perhaps because they have practice of dealing with shadows, as opposed to the world of ideas. In the third stage, the prisoners emerge from the cave and are forced to look at the objects of the higher world, yet the philosopher claims that this process is not easy, as liberation requires work and exertion. Finally, in the fourth stage, the prisoner returns to the cave with his/her new understanding towards ideas, and learns to discern the truth.

Here however, back in the cave, he/she also encounters danger as the individual may meet with
violence from those who have not yet been exposed to the outside world. Truth, he points out, exists neither on the side of the subject, in the sense of a truthful statement, nor on the side of the object, in the sense of a correct description. It is, instead, a happening, an unfolding, taking place as a double movement—a movement from the world, which reveals itself, emerges; and a movement from the individual, who takes possession of the world and opens it up. Truth, therefore, has been wrestled from concealment, either as a result of the revealing or emergence of something that exists, or as a result of its being brought out and unveiled. In either case it is “a kind of struggle being waged.” The true view of something is not only a correct one, but an undistorted one. The problem with representation, however, is that words themselves cannot be trusted, as they do not exactly correspond to the “actual” or “real”, but are mere attempts at representation. Leaving this philosophical distrust of language aside, the reading process itself, according to J. Hillis Miller, is similarly a “double movement”, a movement of the text, which unfolds and emerges in the process of reading, and a movement from the individual who “takes possession of the world and opens it up.” Since it is a two-sided process, the ethical responsibility for the text lies on both sides, that of the author and the reader. I claim that Różewicz is a poet strongly conscious also of that “other side” of readerly reception. As such he not only continuously re-reads and re-writes his own texts, but also demands a “further act of language” from his reader. Reading is a struggle for the truth and an ethical act for Różewicz and for his reader.

Using a citation from John Steinbeck, the poet assesses the distrust against language which also exists on the part of the reader. He seems to align himself with the American writer in the evaluation of the aesthetic and ethical cesura brought about by the war. He cites: “once there was war / after that war during which I also / smelled gun powder / wrote Steinbeck / ‘simple people learnt a lot / in the last 25 years and they cannot be / fooled by old magic words. / They don’t believe in the golden future, / composed of words.’” The distrust of logos here is an ethical and philosophical one, but also hints at political disillusionment. Różewicz, already in “Unde malum?,” a poem from Recycling (1996), contended that “no creature apart from man/ does not use words / which can be the tool of a crime // word which lies / wounds infects.” There is also a hint of the utopian future of the political ideology of Socialist Realism in this phrase, as “magical words” which lie in order to present a “golden future” certainly hint at this association.
Moreover, words, which can be tools of crime, also bring to mind the unjust words which lie (the already mentioned evaluation of Borowski, or Adam Ważyk’s assertions that he simply “lost his mind” when he was the chief proponent and “terroretitian” of Stalinism). Similarly, the problem of Heidegger’s fascination with fascist ideology, his stance on the side of National Socialism in 1933-1945, and lack of definitive expiation after the war create a need for a complex and critical stance towards Heidegger. The difference between the philosopher and the poet lies in terms of their approach to historical truth and the moral responsibility of a person, primarily in the fact that for the last thirty years of his life, Heidegger avoided critical confrontation with the problem of the Holocaust and a revision of the results of his fascination with fascism, whereas Różewicz struggled with the topic of the Holocaust throughout his entire life, and his oeuvre and poetics stand for the attempt to arrive at the truth hidden behind words. Critics have noted time and time again that Różewicz is a poet who has lost trust in language. The author contends that in the “fake world” (świat falszywy) he became a poet: “in this type of world / I became a seeker of poetry // I believed / that the seeker of truth / and beauty.” However, here, once again, he stresses his innovatory stance when he contrasts himself with other poets of his generation, who chose to pursue aesthetics rather than truth: “early / (too early) I understood / that which the poets priests / did not want to understand // the seeker of poetry never / was never the seeker of ‘truth’ / was the seeker of beauty / (…) but ‘truth’ may be / ugly repulsive handicapped.” In Credo, Różewicz defines both the aesthetics and ethics of his poetry: “grammar of poetry / is a grammar of silence and lack” // bloodied blinded poetry / begins to speak.” Różewicz reads his own oeuvre in line with some of the critics, who wrote extensively on the trope of silence and absence in his poetry. Since the banality of language and its excess was problematic, Różewicz became fascinated with silence, yet also quickly realized that everything cannot be expressed by silence.

The poet highlights the difficulty, effort and strain required in order to carry out his poetic mission, as well as the seeming fruitlessness of his efforts: “I am a seeker of poetry / since 1938 // bent over the muddied / indolent full of excrement / river of life / I try // I draw from the sea of speech / I pour a hundred times / from the void to the empty / I sieve the sand of words / tired I fall asleep / then the river god / clean cold riveting / runs away / I wake with a lump / of mud in a clenched palm.” The world as such is for Różewicz both a “garbage heap” of recycling, and a
river of waste, in which one hopelessly searches for the gold of ‘truth’. The era of the Klondike in poetry has been dead for over sixty years. With his famous, now turned cliché, phrase, Adorno proclaimed the death of poetry after Auschwitz. Aesthetic and ethical naïveté was lost a long time ago, yet the fake gold of truth and value abounds in our contemporary culture, as logorrhea of words perpetuating falsity and illusions, sometimes purposely, sometimes mindlessly. The poet sees “gold” (which also denotes “excrement”) everywhere: “in the brightness of the sun / in the light of the moon I see / gold / gold gold gold // guano diffused in the cosmos / in ‘eternity’.” Despite this state of affairs, Różewicz tirelessly undertakes his poetic quest, returns and repeats the effort of writing and seeking truth yet again: “I start from the beginning / I start once again / I begin from the end.”

Ending his Credo with these three verses, Różewicz echoes the old Polish poet, Leopold Staff, whose last poetic volume, Ala ma kota (Ala has a cat) (1957), he alludes to in the title of this poetic volume. Now, the ending of Różewicz’s Credo also echoes Staff. Recalling his last meeting with the poet in his Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego (1971), Różewicz wrote about the last efforts of the old poet: “He was starting everything from the beginning, from the smoke of a chimney.” Similarly, Różewicz writes: “I start from the beginning / I start once again / I begin from the end.” Różewicz also returns to his poetic beginnings and to the memory of occupied Poland and his brother Janusz. It was Janusz who gave the poet a volume of Staff’s poetry for his nameday on the 28th of October 1941. Among the three Różewicz brothers, Janusz was the older poet, who guided Tadeusz to poetry and literature. He died tragically as a Home Army soldier executed by the gestapo in 1944. Różewicz has devoted a book to Janusz’s memory, Nasz Starszy Brat (Our Elder Brother) (1992). Janusz, in the inscription of the book of Staff’s poetry which he gave to Tadeusz, wrote: “I give you Staff, I want to tell you, that I don’t wish for you to be the kind of poet he was- why? I don’t like ‘maturity’! Staff lacked youthful ‘imprudence’ of Słowacki, Schiller, Rimbaud – that’s why he is great, but not immortal – and immortality is poetry.” Włodzimierz Wójcik notes that, in remembering Staff, Różewicz is prompted to reflect on the themes of the essence of art and poetry. We are given such reflections in his poem Credo, and appropriately so, as the poet makes a covert reference to Staff and to his brother, who both stood at the beginning of his poetic career.
As Różewicz prepares to exit the literary stage, his quest for recognition, and for an ethically engaged model of reading becomes visibly exposed in his last works. Is he searching for “immortality” or trying to assert his poetic legacy? Recycling, rereading, remembering is a certain “circular haunting” of issues and texts. He wants his readers to both reread for the secret (treating the text as a riddle or puzzle), but also to engage in ethical reading. His battle for recognition and the settling of accounts plays out within this scope of the two opposing forces of speed (technological and social acceleration) and slowdown (of memory, returning, rereading).

Różewicz, the consummate player, sets up roadblocks of secrets, reoccurring problems, and countless intertexts for his ideal reader, and asks that we re-think, re-evaluate, and assume ethical responsibility of engagement for the texts encountered and consumed. No doubt, like Horkheimer and Adorno, Różewicz sees the caesura of war, which defined the aesthetic and ethics of his *oeuvre* as a continuation of Enlightenment formulations of modernity, embodying speed. Yet it is also the same technological speed which led European civilization to the catastrophe of the Holocaust and the utilitarian recycling of human bodies, thus leading the poet to fewer and fewer words, into silence, and into rereading. The contemporary world for Różewicz is a world of garbage, an amalgamation of useless objects, ideas, fragments which do not cohere with one another. Such a world is ruled by kitsch and shoddiness. Within this world Różewicz opposes pseudo-avantgardism, which possesses little intellectual or artistic integrity and which is geared mainly at commercial success. In asking his reader to practice careful rereading and reading for the secret, Różewicz in essence is also asking us to practice ethical reading in the sense in which Phelan and Miller understand it.

Moreover, he also calls for full ethical responsibility as a “further act of language,” which inevitably translates this ethical act from the private to the public realm of our reading praxis. If we are indeed a “thinking reed”, we must make interpretive, aesthetic, but also ethical judgements about the texts we read. Różewicz demands that his ideal reader will respond to the irresistible demand of any text with the imperative of “I must”, which will in turn cause other acts in the interpersonal, social, and even political realm. Each time Różewicz rereads a text, or rereads and re-writes a text of his own authorship, he renews his responsibility to that text and to what he has written. Rereading is an act of memory and re-engagement. It is a re-tracing and re-evaluating of one’s commitments. Yet the act of re-writing is also about leaving new traces, a
new ethical act of language. Playing a strategic game of asserting his relevance, he engages in a marketing ploy with *Kup Kota w worku*, asking the public to reconsider their reading of the old poet once again and take an ethical stance in their reading praxis.

As Różewicz nears the end of his career, with *Kup kota w worku (work in progress)* he again returns to his earlier texts, perhaps not only to reconfirm or reevaluate his commitments but also to show readers the connections between his works, which in turn highlight his intuitions, which remained unrecognized. He contends:

*The point is that I always wanted for people to read me, for them to know, that certain problems which now appear on the news, in the daily papers, I wrote about, sensed quarter of a century and half a century ago. (...) I wrote poems about the death of ideas, about the twilight of ideas, almost no one noticed. No! They had to wait half a century until Fukuyama tells them. I am not crying here on your shoulder, but rather saying: For the love of god, read thorough once carefully my poems, plays, and short stories.*

It is noteworthy that Różewicz lists poetry, drama, and prose on equal footing as his means of expression, asserting that the reader should look for his intuitions and ideas about European civilization in all three genres of his work. Różewicz sees himself as an intellectual who has spent most of his life in communist Poland, and as such his work has been marginalized within the European setting. There is a sense of regret and disappointment in the above quote in the fact that post-1989, Poland still chooses to look elsewhere, to imitate, promote, and embrace that which comes from the “west” as news or novelty, and that we don’t take time to know, read, and promote that which is our own. That is why as he nears the end of his life, he knows that his time to change his reception, how he is being read, and to have his precursory ideas acknowledged, is running out. He wants credit where credit is due. Although he asserted that when he was creating his new poetics, it was to be about anonymity, he discloses that he wants recognition and does not want to be forgotten: “I created new ‘poetics’, which is characterized by the fact that it is open, devoid of rules. It accepts everything and everyone. I created it in order to disappear. But when I start disappearing in the crowd, already anonymous… I get irritated and curse. Yet, I should depart in silence. I know that I am will be trying to do that. A primitive feeling of literary ownership arises in me… unfortunately.” With *Kup kota w worku*, Różewicz refuses to depart quietly; on the contrary, he wants to raise a public and critical fervour around this volume in order for this and other works to be attentively reread and reconsidered. He wants these
precursory claims to be formally acknowledged, he wants to be remembered as an innovator and
he desires recognition for his discoveries.

Różewicz wants an engaged, committed reader who will first and foremost read ethically. Let us
turn to J. Hillis Miller as he defines the ethics of reading:

By the ‘ethics of reading’ … I mean that aspect of the act of reading in which there is a
response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an
irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response
for the further effects, ‘interpersonal,’ institutional, social, political, or historical, of
my act of reading, for example as that act takes the form of teaching or published
commentary on a given text. What happens when I read must happen, but I must
acknowledge it as my act of reading (…).107

If the poet asserts that his work has been misread, that ideas have not been picked up on,
understood, and acknowledged, any faithful and engaged reader would take it upon him/herself
to return, reread, and then take responsibility for their act of reading while it leaves the private
and enters the public realm. Różewicz wishes for that type of reading praxis, and that type of
reader.

NOTES

1 Tadeusz Różewicz, Kup kota w worku: (work in progress) (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008), 91.
“czerpie z brudnej rzeki życia” All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. The Polish original appears
in Italics in notes.

2 The play made its debut on the stage on March 25, 1960 in Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw.

3 Tadeusz Różewicz. Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut
tytuł to ze ‘Szpilek’. Widziałem tam taki dowcip-rysunek: interesanci tłoczą się w poczekalni dyrektora, sekretarka
mówi stanowczo: ‘Dyrektor zajęty.’ Tymczasem dyrektor u siebie w gabiniecie siedzi przy biurku, ręce i papier
ma kota. Zaczął wszystko od początku, od dymu z komina.”


Kup kota w worku, 15. “i pomyśleć że taki fineas Ganse uchodzi za arcydzieło światowej literatury.”
Różyewicz, Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego, 11. “Jestem w poezji przeciwieństwem starego poety.”

Ibid., 11.

Ibid., 205.

“CO TU MACIE?
Rzecz dzieje się w zbiornicy makulatury.
KIEROWNIK: Co tu macie?
PAROBEK (kopie worek szpicem lakierka): A nic takiego…
KIEROWNIK: Przecież kota w worku nie kupię.
PAROBEK: iii… troche starych szmat… szkoda gadać.
KIEROWNIK: Pokażcie, pokażcie.
PAROBEK: A cóż tu pokazywać, jeszcze się pan kierownik upaprze.
KIEROWNIK: Rozwiążcie worek – popatrzę.
PAROBEK (rozwiązuje niechętnie worek): Pan kierownik to istny Tomasz niewierny.
KIEROWNIK: (zagląda do worka): A cóż to takiego, ręka?
PAROBEK: Eee, jaka tam ręka.
KIEROWNIK: No przecież widzę – ręka ludzka z pięcioma palcami.
PAROBEK: A cóż w tym dziwnego, przecież tak zawsze było, z pięćmi…
KIEROWNIK: (zagląda do worka): A cóż to takiego, ręka ludzka z pięcioma palcami.
PAROBEK: Pewnie żywy, ino śpi, bo się zdrożył; no to jak, bierzecie?
KIEROWNIK: A co ja z tym zrobię?
PAROBEK (zawiązuje worek): Pan Bóg się nie boisz?
KIEROWNIK: Przecież Pan Bóg umarł.


Różyewicz, Kup kota w worku, 15.

Różyewicz, Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego, 104. “Jednego pilnuję: Słowa. Tego się nie wyrzekam. Ludzie, którzy się bawią słowem, uważam za głupie i nieszczęśliwe albo szczęśliwe i niedorozwinięte istoty. Nie przez jąkanie, rozbijanie, torturowanie słów, sylab, dźwięków… ale przez słowa i przez zdanie ‘zupełnie normalne’ można zawiadomić zainteresowanych o zaginionym w poezji…”


Andrzej Franaszek, “Don Koszot z Radomska,” Tygodnik Powszechny September 23, 2008. „Jeśli rzeczywiście – jak przekonuje nas poeta od lat 60. – „człowiek współczesny / spada we wszystkich kierunkach / równocześnie”, to utwory z „Kota w worku” nie stanowią dla tego spadania żadnej przeciwwagi, nie tyle obojga...”
jakąś prawdę, przeciwstawiając się chaosowi, co tak naprawdę chaos ten tylko pomnażają. (...) Nie są to diagnozy nowe. I nie są też, oczywiście, bezzasadne. Problem leży gdzie indziej: i w strategii, i w jakości wykonania.” My translation.

14 Franaszek, “Don Kiszot z Radomska.”


24 A term used by Matei Calinescu in Rereading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).


In *Narrative Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), Phelan defines the following narrative terms, which are vital for my analysis: 1) authorial audience, 2) narrative audience, 3) unreliable narratortion 4) reliable narration, 5) double-voicing, 6) reader’s engagement, 7) instabilities and tensions. Throughout my text I observe the norms of Phelan’s definitions. These are as follows: **Authorial audience** – the ideal (if hypothetical) audience the author writes for and who understands the text perfectly (this term is synonymous with implied reader); **Narrative audience** – subsumed within the authorial audience’s position; it is the role of an observer taken within the world of fiction by the flesh-and- blood reader, which suspends disbelief treats the fictional world as real; **Reliable narration** – narration in which the narrator’s judgements about reported facts differ from that of the implied author; **Unreliable narration** – narration in which the narrator’s report of events and judgement are in accord with those of the implied author; **Double-voicing** – presence of (at least) two voices in an utterance (eg. in an unreliable narration, the reader hears both the unreliable narrator’s voice, and implied author’s voice undermining the narrator’s); **Instabilities and tensions** – instability is an unstable situation within the story (between character, a character and his / her world, or within a single character), whereas tensions are unstable situations within discourse (discrepancy in knowledge, judgement, values between the narrator and authorial audience or between implied author and authorial audience).

Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 23. “cóż ja! tegoroczna maturzystka i powieściopisarka popelniam blędy i nie wstydzę się tego zresztą w tej chwili pod znakiem zapytania cała ortografia w związku z tym że my internauci skracamy słowa do liter znosimy duże i w ogółe jedna lub dwie litery na smesie mniej robi styl...”

Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 25. “ostatnie zdanie mojej powieści napisałam 24 lutego 2006 r. a dzisiaj jest 3 marca 2006 i to nie wiadomo czy marca a co było między temi dwoma piątkami Nic wypełniono panepidemią grypy której ofiarą padł pierwszy kot... ten strumień monologu który unosi mnie w inną rzeczywistość zmęczył mnie a nawet znużał będę pisała dalej jako androgyna i raczej ten niż ta...”

Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 24. “mówimy masłoską a nie słowackim czy też bogurodzicą bo chcą być na topie... studenci...jakim to jest pisane językiem normalka język się związa bardzo wielu polaków którzy nie rozumieją słów którymi mówią w kawiarni sejmie rodzinnym kole i rodzinnym senacie...”


Tadeusz Sobolewski,”Różewicz kończy 90 lat,”*Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 9, 2011.

Thirty years after its premiere, Różewicz returns to this image in his conversation with Robert Jarocki, commenting that the old woman “wsyędziała globalny śmietnik.” He adds: “Kiedy ją stworzyłem, to jeszcze nie zauważono, że żyjemy na śmietnikiu (...). Nie chcę mówić, że byłem wieszczem... wieszczem śmietników, ale miałem do przodu wystawione czulki, które reagowały na śmieci albo na to szaleństwo konsumpcyjne.” “Życie w starych i nowych dekoracjach. Z Tadeuszem Różewiczem rozmawia Robert Jarocki,” *Literatura* 1999, nr.5, 9-10.
He became a decisive voice of German literary criticism after the war, yet was a very thorny figure of Polish postwar politics. He alludes to Marcel Reich-Ranicki who is known as "Literaturpapst" (literature-pope). Reich-Ranicki’s mention of “the pope of German literature and criticism” (“papież literatury i krytyki niemieckiej”) is clearly a political statement. He alludes to Marcel Reich-Ranicki who is known as “Literaturpapst” (literature-pope). He became decisive voice of German literary criticism after the war, yet was a very thorny figure of Polish postwar politics. He alludes to Marcel Reich-Ranicki who is known as “Literaturpapst" (literature-pope). He became decisive voice of German literary criticism after the war, yet was a very thorny figure of Polish postwar politics. He alludes to Marcel Reich-Ranicki who is known as “Literaturpapst” (literature-pope).


52 Ibid., 229.


58 Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 68. “a przecie już w roku 1938 / uczono nas na PW (przysposobienie wojskowe) / że nawet nienabita broń / należy trzymać / w dół / lub do góry / bo jak mawia pan sierżant / 'jak Pan Bóg dopuści / to i z kija wypuść' (tzn. wystrzeli)...”

59 Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 69. “przypominam sobie / że w roku 1944 / mimo braku amunicji w akcji 'Burza' / partyzant 'Szczerbaty' przestrzeli / sobie stopę / po czterdziestu latach został / mianowany na stopień / kaprala podchorążego // (który skreślono w okresie / 'kultu jednostki'... itp., itd.) / ale to już inna historia.”

60 Różewicz, *Kup kota w worku*, 70. “(...) na konspiracyjnym kursie / podchorążych piechoty Armii Krajowej / w obwodzie Radomsko – po / ukończeniu kursu otrzymałem / stopień kaprala podchorążego // (który skreślono w okresie / 'kultu jednostki'...) itp., itd.”


Tadeusz Różewicz, “Jak powstawała moja poetyka. (Kartki z gliwickiego dziennika),” Kwartalnik Artystyczny 4 (68) 2012.

Ibid. “Nikt tego poematu nie zrozumiał. Przecież ta „uliczka bez rąk i nóg uliczka bez głowy”, „ulica kota w worku” – to wszystko czysta autobiografia. Właśnie w Elegii... opisywałem własną sytuację, która już w latach 1948–1949 wydała mi się taka właśnie... Ani jeden krytyk tego nie odczytał. Po wydrukowaniu utworu otrzymałem list od T. Borowskiego. Ten zrozumiał poemat. On go zresztą mógł zrozumieć.”

Ibid. Kartki z gliwickiego dziennika, 7 marca 1959. “(...) W Warszawie mówią mi koleżanki, że T.B. był donosicielem. Jeśli z najczystszego i najzdolniejszego potrafił zrobić szmatę... Boże, zmiłuj się nad nim, był i pozostał czysty. A literacka kupa gnoju paruje dalej między Krakowskim Przedmieściem i Wiejską, w ‘Kameralnej’ i ‘Spatifie’.”

See Andrzej Sapia’s documentaries: Tadeusz Różewicz (2000); Różewicz w teatrze (2003); Różewicz we fragmentach (2006); Poeta emeritus (2010).


Różewicz, Kup kota w worku 84. “grosik dla powieściopisarza / grosik dla poety męczennika / błazna śpiewającego / w ognistym piecu cenzury / trzy grosiki od bogini zwycięstwa / od petrarki od herdera / od goethego i büchnera / dla kundelka i Homera / trzy oskary dla King-Konga / milliard dla hary potera.”

Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 84.

Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 84. “siedzimy na parnasie / pokazujemy / parchy kikuty rany blizny / (te za ojczyznę i te od ojczyzny) / kucamy pod świątyniami bankami / przy wrotach cmentarnych / przy krematoriiach ścianach śmierci / siedzimy w mundurach helmach / w krwi przesiąkniętych szmatach muzealnych / w pasiakach i frakach / kostiumach teatralnych.”

Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 84-85. “producenti śmierci popromiennej / (...) producenti strachu / Sponsorzy kultury wysokiej / z niskiej półki.”

Ibid., Kup kota w worku, 86.

See Mark 4:8-10, Luke 8:8, Matthew 13:8-10, or Matthew 11:14-16.

Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 86. “Alan Midas Greens Pan Wolf / Pan Baryłka Ropy i Poter Herry / rządzą globem / Złoty Cielec gasi pragnienie / czarnym złotem / Alan pisze w wannie best-seller / prorokuje Czarny Czwartek / roku 1929 kiedy zaczął się / Wielki Kryzys.”

Ibid., 86.

See: “Greenspan takes center stage in Age of Turbulence” http://www.usatoday.com/money/books/2007-09-17-greenspan-cover_N.htm

Różewicz, Kup Kota w worku, 7. “potem jak 5-latki zaczęły czytać i interpretować (!) gombrowicz na listach przestały wogóle czytać.”
81 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 89. “Tadziu nie z ciebie nie wyrośnie / słyszę głos z krzaka bzu / powiedz mi chłopce / co to jest FED / nie wiem / a co to jest Wall Street / a wiesz ty co to jest Dow / nie wiem ale Wall Street / to ulica w Ameryce! / a kto odkrył Amerykę / to nie ja panie profesorze.”

82 Witold Gombrowicz, Ferdydurke, 46. “Słowacki wielkim poetą był.”

83 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 89. “największą prawdą XXI wieku / i największą tajemnicą jest TO / że nie ma prawdy / prawdziwy świat / został skradziony ludziom / i bogom / na to miejsce Księżę tego świata / podsunął ostatnim ludziom / świat fałszywy / oceikający złotem krwi ropą.”


86 Mark Wrathall, 452.

87 Ibid., 460.

88 Ibid., 460.


90 J. Hillis Miller, The ethics of reading. 45.

91 Kup kota w worku, 89-90. “była raz wojna / po tej wojnie na której i ja / powołałem prochu / pisał Steinbeck / ‘prości ludzie nauczyli się bardzo wiele / w ciągu ostatnich 25 lat i już nie można / ich oszukać starymi magicznymi słowami. / Nie wierzą w złotą przyszłość, / składającą się ze słow.””


94 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 89. “w takim świecie / zostałem poszukiwaczem poezji // wierzyłem / że poszukiwaczem prawdy / i piękna.”

95 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 90. “wcześniej (za wcześnie) zrozumiałem / to czego nie chcieli zrozumieć / poeci kaplani // poszukiwacz poezji nigdy / nigdy nie był poszukiwaczem ‘prawdy’ / był poszukiwaczem piękna / (...) przecież ‘prawda’ może być / brzydka obrażająca kaleka.”

96 Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 90. “gramatyka poezji / to gramatyka milczenia i braku” (...) // okrwawiona ślepą poezja / zaczyna mówić.”

97 See for example: Tomasz Kunz, Strategie negatywne w poezji Tadeusza Różewicza: od poetyki tekstu do poetyki lektury (2005) and Dariusz Szczukowski, Tadeusz Różewicz wobec niewyraźnego (2008).
Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 91. "Jestem poszukiwaczem poezji / od roku 1938 // pochylony nad mną / gnuśną pełną odchodów / rzeką życia / próbuję // czerpię z morza mowy / przelewan sto razy / z próżnego w puste / przesiewam piasek słów / zmęczony zasypiam / wtedy bóg rzeki / czysty zimny porywając / ucieka / budzę się z grudką / blotą w zaciśniętej dłoni."

Różewicz, Kup kota w worku, 91. "W blasku słonica / w świetle księżyca widzę / złoto / złoto złoto złoto // guano rozpylone w kosmosie / w 'nieskończoności.'"

Różewicz, Przygotowanie do wieczoru autorskiego, 22. "Zaczynał wszystko od początku / zaczynał jeszcze raz / zaczynał od końca."


Wójcik, Staff i Różewicz, 73.


J. Hillis Miller, The ethics of reading, 43.
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