POST-SCRIPT ROT:
IMPOSSIBLE IMPERATIVE TRANSLATION IN POST-1989 TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ

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Joseph H. Muller, B.A.

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Joseph H. Muller, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Nicole Rizzuto, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the post-1989 poems of Tadeusz Różewicz in relation to Anglophone scholarly discussions that have developed about, for, and against “world literature.” Mostly contained in the fields of comparative literature and translation studies, these discussions consider the political effects of translation on postcolonial worlds. Różewicz’s late poems speak to this disciplinary interest by embracing what I theorize as nationless and even ownerless translation. That is to say, by reworking, repeating, recontextualizing, and translating previous work, and by inviting the reader to participate in these processes, Różewicz moves beyond a conception of his work as the property of authors or nations. The source of his interest in ownerless translation lies in the problematic maturation of collective memory into national myth. Having produced texts that refer to the Holocaust and other atrocities for many years, Różewicz is now concerned about the ways that such texts are read and translated. He sees that they are being appropriated in programs of collective memory that privilege the nation even in mundane, obscure, and ordinary ways, and he keeps trying to replenish their subversive meanings, encouraging readers to do the same. Różewiczian world literature could therefore be said to exist as a translational impulse that constantly searches for those fleeting iterations of itself that attach ethically to the material and social conditions of both their historical referents and their sites of reading.
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Imagine three artists, advanced in years, drinking beer. They are Tadeusz Różewicz, an East-Central European poet and dramatist famous for telling the Holocaust in spare, stripped-down poems; Francis Bacon, an elusive Western European painter known for his macabre images of screaming mouths; and Adam Czerniawski, Różewicz’s friend and Anglophone translator. For thirty years, the poet tells us, Różewicz has been trying to track Bacon down because he thinks their art shares something important. Now, in 1994, they are finally sitting across from each other, but Różewicz comes up against a communication barrier, and desperately asks Adam to help him:

przecież ja Adamie
nie mogę powiedzieć
Baconowi
On nie zna języka polskiego
ja nie znam języka angielskiego

powiedz mu że debiutował in 1947 Niepokojem
w roku 1956 pisałem:

jeszcze oddychające mięso
wpelnione krwi
jest pożywieniem
tych form doskonalych [...]
The text on the left comes directly from the poem “Francis Bacon, czyli Diego Velázquez na fotelu dentystycznym” in *zawsze fragment* [*Always a Fragment*] (1996), a book of poems Różewicz published mostly but not entirely in Polish. The text on the right comes from Joanna Trzeciak’s excellent English translation, *Sobbing Superpower* (2011). As shown, Różewicz quotes his own poems, both in the original Polish text and in an old English translation, in order to show Bacon that their artistic material might be similar. But if Bacon were to agree to this, his paintings would be subject to the reading that Różewicz’s poems have traditionally invited: that they engage directly with the Holocaust by citing, referencing, and representing it. Can Bacon be convinced that his horrible mouths and deformed bodies speak to genocide?

The poem answers this question when Bacon refuses even to acknowledge Różewicz, despite the presence of a translator who can overcome national language barriers. Bacon ignores Różewicz—“Bacon udawał że nie słyszy” ([zf 12] [“Bacon pretended he didn’t hear” (185)]—and mutters non-sequiturs about himself into his beer ([zf 13; Sobbing Superpower 186]. In this way the poem describes a new communication problem for Różewicz, who is now over 70 years old: the setting of his texts’ reading around the globe. Fortunately and unfortunately, his poetry will usually be read by financially secure people in wealthy, peaceful, cosmopolitan places. He will have to come to terms with the banal scenes of artistic consumption in which even Francis Bacon, a specialist in disturbing images of human bodies, thinks “sztuka współczesna stała się grą” ([zf 7] [“modern art has become a game” (181)] and disengages when confronted with Różewicz’s kind of literature. Bacon’s actions exemplify the banal failure of the speech act that
narrates or cites historical trauma and violence. This becomes highly significant in the timeline of Różewicz’s life’s work: he realizes, in 1994, that his 1950s poems are reaching deaf ears even when they are annunciated clearly in English, the world’s linguistic hegemon.¹

So he goes to work, producing a book of poems almost every two years between 1994 and 2008. These books supplement his earlier postwar writing of the 1940s and 1950s, which quickly became an iconic part of the Polish national literary tradition, and has since been translated into over a dozen languages. The earlier poetry had first appeared in 1947 in Niepokój [Anxiety] under the shadow of World War II and its millions of deaths. It had been quickly labeled “antipoetry” for its stripped-down, clipped style and bleak witness to trauma (Hirsh). Now, following a period from the 1960s to the 1980s in which Różewicz wrote mostly plays (Sokoloski), he returns in the 1990s and 2000s to poetry. The new poems update the antipoetic mode of writing, expanding its scope and adding a tendency for infectious intertextuality.

This thesis considers the post-1989 work in relation to Anglophone scholarly discussions that have developed about, for, and against “world literature.” Mostly contained in the fields of comparative literature and translation studies, these discussions consider the political effects of translation for a postcolonial world. Scholars are discussing how the practice of translating texts might dismantle or perpetuate institutional and cultural structures of power that still reflect the inequality originating in European colonialism.² Some have called for a move beyond the

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¹ There are additional formal elements of zawsze fragment that make it clear how little this failure of communication depends on national language barriers. In particular, Różewicz chooses to publish an English translation of this poem in the front of the book, before the Polish version. The primacy of the English version over the Polish one foregrounds the drama between Różewicz and Bacon as something that happens despite, not because of, international translation.

² The conversation to which I am referring is somewhat coterminous with what has been called the “translation turn” in comparative literary and cultural studies. Near the beginning of the turn, Franco Moretti’s widely read essay conjecturing the meaning of “world literature” became a provocation for further discussion. Moretti advocated “distant reading”, a type of quantitative formalism in which the critic does a broad survey of other critics’ close readings in order to find global structural patterns. In Moretti’s view, close reading is a limited tool that has held
language of metropole and periphery, and for ways to conceive of literature that travels through a
decentered array of points of connection between modernisms, rather than through the singular
landscape of one “world literature,” a “single homogenizing worldwide literary sphere” (Berman
69).

Różewicz’s late poems speak to this conversation about world literature by embracing
what I theorize as nationless and even ownerless translation. That is to say, by reworking,

back New Critics and Poststructuralists alike; rather than reaching global conclusions about the whole of published
literature in all the world’s languages, they have merely been re-forming cosmopolitan canons.

Several years later, David Damrosch makes an influential case for world literature as literature that travels:
“I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in
translation or in their original language” (What is World Literature 4). Damrosch’s formulation varies from
Moretti’s in several key ways. While Moretti tries to consider the vast totality of works excluded by national canons
that no one person has ever been able to read in a lifetime (“Conjectures” 55), Damrosch limits world literature to the
works that leave their cultures of origin. Damrosch also instinctively maintains his deference for close reading, not only because of its “pleasures” but also because “systemic approaches need to be counterbalanced with close
attention to particular passages, specific texts” (WIWL 26).

Departing from Moretti and Damrosch, Emily Apter constructs in The Translation Zone an “intellectual
topography” (5) of translation that is organized between two poles: “everything is translatable,” and “nothing is
translatable.” While her book avoids making an overt argument, she does tentatively advocate a type of non-
Eurocentric philology that could counterbalance Moretti’s distant reading (53-64), assuming such a philology can
avoid returning to the “‘racing’ of the human” that has beset the philological tradition throughout the twentieth
century (35-40). (For a treatment of “human”, see 17n10.) More recently, Apter has written against big-letter World
Literature, as it has emerged in the 2000s through efforts such as David Damrosch’s Institute for World Literature at
Harvard University. She argues in Against World Literature (2013) that this sub-discipline fell short of its promises
because it presupposed translatability: “at its core World Literature seemed oblivious to the Untranslatable” (8-9).
But rather than surrendering the Untranslatable to national literatures, Apter recuperates it as a genre of lower-case
world literature itself: “translation and untranslatability are constitutive of world forms of literature” (16).
Untranslatable texts from around the world are unified conceptually for the same reason that they cannot be unified
in print for a single reader.

The debates about world literature and translation have also been considered in Polonophone academia as a
part of the parent field of comparative cultural and literary studies; the word used for comparative as opposed to
national literary practice is “komparatystyka”, which translates literally as comparatics. Andrzej Hejmej and
Tomasz Bilczewski have recently produced articles that summarize the theorizations of scholars including Moretti,
Damrosch and Apter, as if to make sense of the influx of Anglophone critical work that has increasingly influenced
Polish national literary study. In a historiography of comparative literary study and Polish literary history, Maria
Delaperrière narrates how postcolonial theory entered the epistemic horizons of Polonists in the 1990s and 2000s. In
her analysis, postcolonialism has recently started to compel Polish cultural and literary historians to reconsider the
nature of Polish connections to Western European culture. She characterizes Polish intellectuals’ changing
understanding of their relationship to “Europe” by speaking of “polskie tożsamości schizofrenicznej, w której
opozycja między przynależnościa do kultury europejskiej i tragiczną świadomością oddalenia od niej komplikuje się
wyraźnie w momencie, gdy mieszkańcy Wschodniej Europy uświadamiają sobie pogłębianą się inwolucję
zachodniej kultury” [“a schizophrenic Polish identity, in which the opposition between the adherence to European
culture and the tragic memory of departing from it is clearly complicated when residents of Eastern Europe become
aware of their own deepening implication in Western culture”] (31). Whereas “Europe”, i.e. Western Europe, had
for many decades been something to adopt or reject programatically, now the terms of necessary prior implication
and connectivity—the always already of theory—are active in critical Polonophone discourse.
repeating, recontextualizing, and in a sense I will discuss at length, *translating* previous work, and by inviting the reader to participate in these processes, Różewicz moves beyond a conception of his work as the property of authors or nations. The source of his interest in ceaseless ownerless translation lies in the problematic maturation of collective memory into national myth. Having produced texts that refer to the Holocaust and other atrocities for many years, Różewicz is now concerned about the ways that such texts are read and translated. He sees that they are being appropriated in programs of collective memory that privilege the nation even in mundane, obscure, and ordinary ways, and he keeps trying to replenish their subversive meanings, encouraging readers to do the same. Różewiczian world literature could therefore be said to exist as a translational impulse that constantly searches for those fleeting iterations of itself that attach ethically to the material and social conditions of both their historical referents and their sites of reading.

Less densely stated, I argue that Różewicz’s post-1989 poetry constructs translation as a practice, a theory, and a paradoxical imperative. With regard to the practice, the 1990s and 2000s were a time of intense translational activity in East-Central Europe. In the first chapter, I explore several key aspects of post-1989 history to develop the significance of translation and a closely related process, revision. Revision is an important theme for post-1989 East-Central Europe because it is inherent in the desire for new takes on topics long constrained by the programs of authoritarian states. In the years after the fall of communism, English replaced Russian as the most common mandatory second language in grade schools, incomes rose unevenly as state economies were privatized and integrated into the European Union, labor migrants from job-poor areas flocked to wealthy Schengen Zone cities for cash, the tight hold of the Catholic church on social mores and education slackened, and movements such as feminism and, to a lesser extent,
LGBTQ activism gained increasing support. Although all of these developments could become legible through Różewicz’s late poems, the most important social change for this thesis is the dramatic revision of the collective memory of the Holocaust in the 1990s. For decades, the state-controlled museum outside the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp had misrepresented the events of the Holocaust, obscuring the Jewish identity of the majority of its victims, or what Geneviève Zubrzycki calls its “Jewish fact.” Instead of representing Jews as the main victims of the camp, the communist authorities had exaggerated the victimhood of non-Jewish “nations,” especially the “Polish nation,” at the hands of “the fascists.” That not even Auschwitz-Birkenau was accurately historicized before 1989 demonstrates the importance of revising official communist narratives at the end of the century. As Aleksandra Ubertowska notes, Różewicz’s post-1989 poems take part in this second wave of Holocaust memory (126).

Also in chapter one, I draw out a theory of translation through the works of scholars of poststructuralism, Marxism, and nationalism. First, I address the concepts of nation and nationalism as ideological forces that always affect the way translation represents both nations and language. To show the stakes of representing the nation, I explicate a series of essays by the early 20th-century Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg on the principle of national autonomy and its implications for the working classes and ethnonational minorities. One hundred years after their initial publication, her writings have become relevant again now for the current Polish state, the Third Polish Republic, as it ostensibly determines its own future and integrates into the capitalist European and world systems. Building on Luxemburg’s analysis of the stakes of ethnonationalism, I bring in the more recent concept of “banal nationalism” from social psychologist Michael Billig to frame the stakes of reading Różewicz in the 21st-century. Banal nationalism is the complex of ideological habits that daily reproduce civic nations in established,
developed countries, even though most people in such countries would deny that they are in any way “nationalist.” Finally, I explicate several writings on the philosophy and politics of language and translation by the poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida’s theory of the supplement helps to explain two opposing phenomena. On the one hand, because he believes that in any given instance of discourse the center of reference is always shifting, his philosophy troubles commonsense understandings of speaking clearly, saying what you mean, and representing past events accurately. On the other hand, it renders newly legible the trope of repetition that occurs more and more frequently in late Różewicz. Derrida’s philosophy explains why it is that Różewicz must return again and again to the atrocities that riddle the history of East-Central Europe, instead of letting his early writings settle into the stone of the page. For rewriting is also translation in this theory, and can be described according to its commonly invoked semiotic-ethical double bind: you cannot translate this, you must translate this. The act of translation is made strictly impossible by the constantly shifting nature of discourse yet utterly necessary by the constantly renewing material social needs of its historical moment.

This double bind already begins to describe the double imperative of Różewiczian translation. At the heart of this imperative, there are two contrasting exigencies that are familiar to Memory Studies. On the one hand, the event must be told to future generations. On the other hand, this telling should never be thought of as so accurate and complete that the event does not need to be retold in new ways.³ Both of these exigencies are legible in Różewicz’s late poetry; often they are depicted as contradicting each other in scenes of writing and rewriting. However, because the Holocaust has already been “told” in writing, and has in fact been told more than any other single event of collective trauma in 20th-century history, the translation imperative in these

³ Astrid Erll suggests that this constantly renewing “how” of memory emerges from “the basic insight that the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented” (Young et al. 7).
poems is more focused on the need to say again, to repeat, to keep reworking earlier material. Translators should be activist, Różewicz thinks, in that they should realize and resist the obscure power of economic, cultural, and political forces that, even as they distance the history of the Holocaust from themselves, develop institutions and conditions that enable its repetition by participating in its forgetting. So, as I argue, even as he welcomes translation as the inevitable means of survival of the work his poetry does, Różewicz challenges translators to pay attention to the mundane material and cultural forces that will predetermine the politics of their work, even as those banal forces pale in comparison to the monolithic events referenced.

These two imperatives, to tell and to interrogate every instance of telling to find its political effect, allow me to organize translational phenomena in Różewicz’s late poetry into the categories of necessary translation and detrimental translation. Taking the second category first, chapter two explores the trope of detrimental textual alteration by examining instances of erasure, recycling, decay, displacement, effacement, deletion, rust, and black-and-white bifurcation. Textual erasure emerges as an ethically alarming translational activity. The formal qualities of poems such as “Recycling” [“Recycling”] and “The Professor’s Knife” [“nożyk profesora”] tell of the erasure of voices witnessing trauma. This erasure is all the more disturbing because the forces causing it are mundane and normalized, and therefore harder to maintain conceptually as threats to Holocaust representation. Among them are institutions, such as the fashion industry and the national banks of Europe, as well as language-related habits, such as lighthearted hyperbole, the normal use of national categories for people and things, and the tendency for readers to get tired when faced with long poems. These forces, although easily seen as benign next to the spectacular “Evil” of the Holocaust, are shown to affect the processes of translation, reading, and memory.
In chapter three, “Gray Supplementarity,” ethically necessary translation is figured as supplementarity, lack, addition, grayness, and the interpellation of the reader as a translator. I examine translation as a hopeful activity that Różewicz performs and invites the reader to take up too. Of the many ways repetition is figured, the post-scripts with which many poems end are a particularly salient example. The post-script figure demonstrates how supplementation can manifest itself as the madness of the writer, because it records a writer’s immediate dissatisfaction with what she has written as well as her attempt to remedy the lack perceived. The second main trope of this chapter is the grayscale or “gray zone,” which I read as lack that invites the reader to become a translator. In poems marked by the grayscale, especially in the last two regular books of poems, Różewicz asserts that words are failing him and that language is being stirred together into one great soup of non-distinction. The poems interpellate the reader as translator, as the one who should try to put color into the gray zone. The poet invites the reader to step into his shoes, supplementing his poetry in her own words.

Throughout all three chapters, nationalism returns as a perennial question affecting Różewiczian translation and coloring its background. Crucially, however, the nationalism at stake here is not only the ultranationalism of the National Socialist, Polish, German, Russian, or Israeli varieties. It is not merely the intense and spectacular ideology of border clashes, revolutions, and violent mobs chanting “Wir sind das Volk” [“We are the People”] or “Polska dla Polaków” [“Poland for the Poles”]. It is also the banal nationalism of the United States and other established states, where even internationalism and professed interest in “the world” carry US national interests, such as the spread of the English language, in tow. Indeed, much of the institutional support for translation studies and world literature originates in US universities and public institutions. This banal US nationalism that hides under the cloak of internationalism even
implicates me as an Anglophone US citizen studying translation into English. The dominant language of my country is also the global *lingua franca* and the language Różewicz knows he must reach:

wołam po angielsku I cry out in English
help me help me help me help me
(po polsku nikt już nie rozumie) (no one understands Polish any more)
*(Szara Strefa 15-16)* *(new poems 55-56)*

Thus nationalism operates in this thesis as a force in play both in the distantly focalized historical moment *and* in the closer, more recent moment of writing, reading, and translation. Nazi genocide represented on a page is something that many kinds of nationalism have influenced and will keep influencing through the process of reading and rewriting. These multiple manifestations of nationalism comprise one of the principal concerns of chapter one.
Chapter 1. Framing Translation and Nation in Post-1989 Różewicz

Przerzucam
most który łączy przeszłość
z przyszłością
(nożyk profesora 8)

I build a bridge
linking the past
to the future
(Sobbing Superpower 221)

In recent Różewicz criticism, a number of comprehensive studies have emerged of his work as a whole from a variety of perspectives including structuralist, poststructuralist, and narratological, and with varied interest in attaching to him one, both, or neither of the labels of modernism and postmodernism. But despite this variety of perspectives, the issues of translation and nation

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4 If critics’ multiple readings of Różewicz are any indication, Halina Filipowicz was right in noting that “inconsistency is at the very core of [Różewicz’s] creative process” (5). The new turns that his late writing have taken make statements about Różewicz’s work as a whole even more difficult.

Yet, among the major monographs of the last few decades, one of the most consistent critical conclusions is that Różewicz’s poetry is driven by “ethical” considerations, despite being described as “apolitical” in the sense that he stubbornly refused to take a stance for or against the communist party throughout the bleakest days of Stalinism. While Andrzej Skrendo, Tadeusz Drewnowski, Tomasz Kunz, and Dariusz Szczukowski have all invoked this commonplace since the year 2000, the work of Joanna Adamowska has developed the ethical or “axiological” reading of Różewicz the most. She compares Różewicz to his contemporary Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), arguing that both poets have a similar “axiological sensitivity” inflecting the structures of their writing. This strain of reading Różewicz’s ethics seems to be a modification of the older reading of him as a “moralist.” In his book originally written in the 1980s, Tadeusz Drewnowski gives expression to this conventional reading of Różewicz as a “subtle moralist” who managed to defy Adorno’s dictum by inventing “a new form, which soon gained the worldwide name of ‘poetry after Auschwitz’” (317).

Structuralist and poststructuralist readings, while acknowledging Różewicz’s ethics, have updated what Filipowicz termed “impure form.” In a largely structuralist account of Różewicz’s poems, Tomasz Kunz develops the influential idea of “negativity” as a key for understanding the structure of his poetics. For Kunz, this negativity signals the failure of signification: “It may be that the greatest of Różewicz’s achievements is his ability to evoke in the reader’s mind the sense of lack or deficiency of meaning, to evoke anxiety and discord that are acute evidence of the paradoxical presence of that which can not be presented in any available form of representation” (272). Dariusz Szczukowski places Różewicz within the modernist tradition by drawing out the trope of the ineffable. His study resembles that of Kunz in its attention to how “the poet’s work becomes an attempt to delimit the boundaries and possibilities of verbalization” [“próba diagnozy granic i możliwości verbalizacji”] (9). In relation to the poems that represent the Holocaust, Szczukowski suggests that the trope of ineffability evidences Różewicz’s stance on the impossibility of witnessing the suffering of the murdered (22).

Tadeusz Browarny focuses on the relatively less studied prose narratives, adopting a narratological perspective that tries to characterize the narrating subject. He argues that the subject of Różewicz’s prose works and narrative poems is not stable with regard to past constructs but contingent on its own experiences as articulated through narration: “From a narrative perspective, the Różewiczian “I” is a modern subject, soliciting its own self-
remain relatively understudied, at least in Polonophone and Anglophone scholarship. In this chapter, I attempt to frame the issues of translation and nation in preparation for analyzing Różewicz’s post-1989 work. I begin by reviewing the history of Polish nationalism and a critique of it by the theorist and activist Rosa Luxemburg in order to draw out Różewicz’s mistrust of linguistic abstractions like “nation.” Then, I make the case that Różewicz is also interested in more recent forces and ideologies that affect the transmission of his texts and their interpretation.

realization, ready to accept new images of (projects for) itself, and mistrustful of metaphysical ideas of the individual and of dogmatic visions of the social human; and it is also a postmodern subject, lacking identity but open to making subsequent attempts, which is to say always-makeshift completions” [“Z perspektywy narratywistycznej Różewiczowskie „ja” to nowoczesny podmiot, zabiegający o samorealizację, gotowy na przyjęcie nowych obrazów (projektów) siebie, nieufny wobec metafizycznego pojęcia osoby i dogmatycznych wizji człowieka społecznego, a przy tym podmiot ponowoczesny, rozproszony i sytuacyjny, nie posiadający tożsamości, ale zmierzający do jej osiągnięcia w kolejnych próbach – zawsze prowizorycznych „ucałościowieniach”] (34).

Whereas Browarny situates the Różewiczian narrator within both modernism and postmodernism, Andrzej Skrendo finds Różewicz’s point of contention with both. He claims that Różewicz’s transgressive and destabilizing moves are an ethical point of disagreement with both modernism and postmodernism (13). For him, Różewiczian “transgression” is driven by an “ethical obligation to give witness to contradictions” [“obowiązek etyczny, o to, aby dawać świadectwo sprzeczności”] (315). In this, he challenges the critical tradition in which Różewicz is read as a poet of pure negation, destruction, and rejection.

When nation and language are considered, they are usually considered separately. No study of which I am aware uses the recently developed tools of nationalism studies to consider Różewicz in a comparative context.

On translation, Andrzej Skrendo takes up the phenomenon of frequent citations of foreign languages in Różewicz's poems, and the problems they create when his poems are then translated into those languages. Are the cited phrases the same, even though they have not been changed at all, when the poems they appear in are translated into the same language? Skrendo argues that "Różewicz's poems not only assume, admit, and expect translation, they exist in the same state that a translation exists" ["Wiersze Różewicz nie tylko zakładają, dopuszczają, i oczekują przekładu, ale istnieją w takim stanie, w jakim istnieje przekład"] (156). For him, the Polish text of a Różewicz poem already has within it the dynamic that exists between an original text and a translation. This reveals a conception of language that does not access a higher, purer language, but destabilizes language.

On nationalism, Halina Filipowicz reads several postwar plays as subverting Romantic heroic myths held dear by the generation who fought in the underground Polish home army during the Nazi occupation and whose dream for an independent Poland was dashed in the late 1940s when the communist state was set up. For Filipowicz, Dead and Buried, The Card Index, and Spaghetti and the Sword interrogate the home army generation’s militaristic nationalist sentiment: “What these plays unmistakably share is a demystifying strategy that warns against the petrifying effect of the national mythology on collective self-recognition” (32). The most subversive, Dead and Buried, was withheld from production and publication by the censorship bureau for seven years after its writing. At its premiere in Warsaw in 1979, it offended and angered audiences by contradicting both the communist narrative of history and the heroic nationalist one (32).

As for scholars who have treated subject formation in Różewicz, they have often done so without regard to nationality, but banal nationalism has often re-entered their discussion, making that subject a priori “Polish”. For example, in the background of his argument concerning the (post)modernity of the Różewiczian subject, Browarny does not seem to question previous conceptions of this subject as a national one. He agrees with Tadeusz Drewnowski that this subject is a “polski everyman” (“Polish everyman”) (23). Even in asserting the provisional nature of the individual’s identity, and in suggesting that Różewicz’s (post)modern subject transcends the nation-state (9), Browarny allows the category of Poland to reconstitute itself as a given.
in long-established nation-states. Following Michael Billig, I theorize many of these forces as “banal nationalism,” the collection of ideologies that reproduce nations as nations in the minds of the whole populace, not just the far right. Finally, I read several Derrida essays in order to open up the structures of repetition and erasure that occur repeatedly in Różewicz’s books of poems after 1989. This is so that the relationships between nation, language, and translation can reveal themselves. It becomes clear that to theorize translation is to interrogate the banal nationalism according to which languages are discrete groupings of words with national names and to reassess conceptions of language that would allow for completely successful meaning-making. Unraveling the connections between nation, language, and translation will yield an understanding of the speaking subject as constitutively alienated in language, yet obligated by material and social circumstances to use it nevertheless.

**Ethnolinguistic Nationalism under Marxist Review**

To ask how Różewicz’s work travels outside of Poland is necessarily to assume the existence of Poland as an entity with literal or figurative boundaries. Merely in using the words “Polish” and “Poland” in association with Różewicz’s output in the last few paragraphs, I have already allowed the normativity of the central European nation-state to establish itself in my text. I have implicitly drawn on a conventional, constructed link between certain marks on a page (Różewicz’s poems) and a definite group of central Europeans who are imagined to share essential or at least extremely significant values, ways of life, semiotic systems, and even ancient kinship (the Polish nation) and who have had sovereignty, increasingly since 1945, over the civic life of all the residents of a territory recognized by most sovereign states around the world (the Polish state).
The stakes of maintaining or breaking with this convention are high, because language is both the medium of Różewicz’s work and the single most important category in the determination of nationality in central Europe. Adeed Dawisha establishes the centrality of language (and the processes it governs, such as history and education) in his analysis of German nationalist philosophers Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte: “to the German cultural nationalists language sits at the heart of any definition of the nation. To Herder and Fichte, it is language that creates the inner cultural frontiers of a nation, regardless of whether or not the nation had yet succeeded in establishing its external geographic boundaries” (66). In Poland, this “cultural nationalism” with its roots in German romanticism has inordinately determined Polish national consciousness.\(^6\) Polish nationalists’ subscription to cultural, pre-state nationalism has been intensified because there has more often than not been no Polish state (Davies 8) with which civic nationality would have been associated.\(^7\) As Norman Davies points out, the extremely strong link between the Polish language and the Polish nation has been encoded in the hyphenated abstraction “ojczyzna-polszczyzna” (16-17). The basic meaning of this extraordinary phrase can be approximated as “fatherland-Polish-language”. Its abstract quality is lost in such a translation, however, since the ending “czyzna” mystifies the noun “ojciec” [“father”] and the adjective “polski” [“Polish”]: language, kinship, and nationality are consolidated into one tight metaphysical knot.

But Różewicz’s poetry has never been the kind to participate in nationalist collective memory. For example, in “dwa wierszyki” [“two little poems”], he articulates a different trajectory for his own poems than the ones that play into the patriotic narrative:

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\(^6\) See also Norman Davies’ discussion of the “German” heritage of Polish nationalism (21).

\(^7\) For an exhaustive treatment of this strain of ethnic nationalism and its sacramentation of language in central Europe, see Tomasz Kamusella’s 1100-page *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe*. 
mój wierszyk
przebity gwoździem
przez zoila
krawi
z języka
spada
bo to jest wierszyk
realistyczny
dotykalny
fizyczny

	twój wierszyk
też śmierelny
ale mistyczny
„patriotyczny”
unosi
się
do nieba

mój wierszyk
zakopany
w rodzinnej ziemi obumiera
z wiosną się budzi
ślępy wypuszcza białe pędy
chce ciągle „do ludzi”

Twój chce
do pana Boga
(po drodze
do narodowego pamiętek
kościoła)

ale Bóg liter nie zna
Bóg wierszy nie czyta

jestemy więc „kwita”

(Plaskorżeźba 21)

The references to Catholicism here are references to the nation by proxy, since Catholicism has become a basic dimension of Polish nationality. At once anti-Catholic and anti-nationalist, this

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8 All translations are mine except when one of the English translations is cited.
9 While the Catholic Church has not always been aligned with Polish nationalism, in People’s Poland it was solidified as an institution of national opposition to the unwanted communist government. As early as 1946, when
poem aligns Różewicz’s writing with the interests of de-sanctified, denationalized “human beings.” The phrase, “do ludzi”, set off by quotation marks, refers to unspecified “people” in general, not to “the people” of a nation (which would be “do ludu”). In contrast, the Catholic nationalist writing referenced by “your little poem” treats the same deathly [“śmiertelny”] material, but reworks it as a part of Catholicism-nationalism.

In addition to national memory programs, all abstractions of the victims of the Holocaust are troubling to Różewicz. He seems always to prefer to use the word “człowiek” (plural “ludzie”), which is a non-gender specific word for a person or a human being. In a section of “nożyk profesora” in which the cattle train signifies genocide, the speaker corrects his own use of “humanity” and replaces it with “people,” suddenly making a figurative discussion physical:

```plaintext
przez pola łąki i lasy               [across fields meadows woods
przez góry doliny                   across mountains valleys
pędzi cicho ciszej                  it races ever more quietly
kamienny pociąg                     the stone train
stoi                               stands
nad otchłanią                       over the abyss
jeśli go ożywi krzyki                if it is ever brought to life by cries
nienawiści                          of hatred
rasistów nacjonalistów             from racists nationalists
fundamentalistów                   fundamentalists
runie jak lawina                    it will crash like an avalanche
na ludzkość                         on humanity
nie na „ludzkość”!                  not onto “humanity”!

na człowieka (nożyk profesora 9)    onto people (new poems 7-8)]
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The translator Bill Johnston chooses the plural “people”, but in Różewicz’s version the word “człowiek” is singular and thereby gains even more intimacy and specificity: “not onto

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96.6 percent of Polish citizens declared Catholicism as their religion, the church was provided with “an unrivalled platform from which, in the absence of all political opposition, to assert itself as the chief moral arbiter of the nation, the principle popular counterweight to an unpopular communist regime. It is an odd state of affairs, but in ‘People’s Poland’, in the heart of the Soviet bloc, the Roman Catholic Church emerged as prosperous, as confident, and as secure as never before” (Davies 164). The widespread perception of pope John Paul II as an anticommunist figure who was sympathetic to the Solidarity movement also attests to the solidification of the Polish nation-church.
‘humanity!’ / onto a human being.” The distinction reveals Różewicz’s stubborn adherence to realistic, physical, palpable representation of Holocaust victims, and his mistrust of metaphysical notions of nations and humanities. By developing a critique of abstract “humanity” in its invocation as that which must be saved from oppressive sovereign powers, Różewicz joins a number of theorists and philosophers including Hannah Arendt, Georgio Agamben, Enzo Traverso, and Achille Mbembe.¹⁰

¹⁰ The phrase “human life” and its sister terms “humanity,” “human rights,” and “the rights of man” have been variously scrutinized in the last half-century, especially in works that develop comparisons between the Jewish genocide and worldwide European colonialism and imperialism.

In the 1950s, Hannah Arendt brought the problematics of “human rights” to the attention of American and Western European intellectuals in her monolithic work on totalitarianism. She sets up her critique by narrating how in the 19th century, when populations were being emancipated and secularized, there was a consensus that basic human rights had to be invoked to protect individuals against the sovereign states that were coming to power (Origins of Totalitarianism 291). However, she points out that vulnerable individuals such as minorities, migrants, refugees, and stateless individuals did not trust this “nonnational guarantee” and instead adamantly claimed to belong to a nation (OT 292). They knew that as long as the nation was linked to the state—the guarantor of legal or civil rights—there was no hope for people who could lay no claim to the rights of a nation. Arendt’s analysis shows how the discourse of “human” rights actually does nothing for people who have no civil rights, i.e. no citizenship in a recognized state. It shows how actual, effectual “humanity” is only extended to national humans, which has often meant Europeans, not to those who are thought to have nothing left but their bare humanity, i.e. the others of Europe’s imagining.

Giorgio Agamben’s influential addition to this tradition takes up and interrogates what Arendt calls “the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human” (OT 297). He identifies an opposition originating in a metaphysical fracture in ancient Greek discourse between zoe and bios, which are the bare fact of life and the political or qualified life, respectively. In modern democracy a new problem arises from this bifurcation of life: namely, the humanitarian discourse that seems to defend the bare life of vulnerable individuals actually effectively reinscribes the metaphysical division that allows for their subjection. Because “modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of zoe” (Homo Sacer 9), it actually reasserts the bareness of certain individuals’ lives, denying them political being and value. In doing so, it perpetuates the boundary between human life and good life and thereby reproduces the category of exception whereby sovereign power is able to exclude some humans from the functional definition of “human life” (HS 126-135).

Also following Arendt, and drawing on the work of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Enzo Traverso makes a broad historical study of “the material conditions and mental frameworks that made the Jewish genocide possible” (6), pushing against the widespread tendency among contemporary historians to “eject the Nazi crimes from the trajectory of the Western world” (8). He argues that the origins lay both in the industrial and technical advances of the Industrial Revolution and the First World War and in the colonial imperialist practices carried out by European governments and corporations around the world. Without ignoring the long history of European anti-Semitism, Traverso suggests that the dehumanizing ideologies of Nazism had been “rethought in light of the colonial wars and genocides”: “Nazism brought together and fused two paradigmatic figures: the Jew, the ‘other’ of the Western world, and the subhuman (Untermensch), the ‘other’ of the colonized world” (19). While Traverso does not focus on the word “human” as such, his argument helps to develop the notion that Nazism shares with many types of European colonialism a similarly structured impulse to restrictively define humanity. It suggests that the question of humanity that interests Różewicz is larger than the Holocaust, and is one of the defining contradictions at the limits of European self-imagination.
A half-century earlier, however, Marxist theoretician and activist Rosa Luxemburg developed a powerful critique of the abstractions of national being, arguing that successful nationalism always serves the interests of the national bourgeoisie at the expense of the working class and national minorities. I have chosen to use her writings to construct the frame of my analysis rather than the theorists more known to later postcolonial and totalitarianism studies because she emerges from the same cultural, geographic, and linguistic spheres as Różewicz. Born in Zamość, a town in the Russian-controlled partition of the Kingdom of Poland, Luxemburg migrated to Germany at the age of 25, where she earned her doctorate and became a central figure in the pacifist, feminist, and socialist movements, including the German Social Democratic party. She wrote either in Polish or German, depending on the audience she wanted to reach. Even the various orthographies of her name demonstrate the imprint of multiple national and ethnic traditions: Rozalia Luxenburg, Róža Luksemburg, Rosa Luxemburg (Abraham). Today, Luxemburg is known as “a Polish German secular Jew, a Marxist political economist and political theorist” (Schulman 1). In current Polonophone cultural criticism and theory, she is beginning to be recuperated from the communist graveyard of Marxist thought, as evidenced by recent activity from the Warsaw-based peer-reviewed journal Praktyka.

Building on this tradition but departing from its interest in the Nazism-imperialism link, Achille Mbembe explores the broader question of how to theorize the ultimate sovereign power that determines the life and death of others. He calls this type of sovereignty “necropower” and its practice “necropolitics” not only because of its prerogative on bodily death, but because of the ways in which it can create conditions of existence that are a form of “death-in-life,” such as slavery (21). Mbembe examines a host of other cases, including African “war machines,” the Rwandan genocide, and the colonial occupation of Palestine, in order to theorize the necropolitical “creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead” (40). Although Mbembe sees his work departing from Agamben’s main focus on the European internment camp as the defining zone to which the others of humanity are relegated, his necropolitics cannot be separated from the use of “human” or its critique, which is what is important for an analysis of Różewicz’s poetry. Even if it is only because he is writing in French and English, Mbembe asserts the humanity as such of the bodies to which he refers. For example, he writes of his topic as “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (14). Thus, the word “human” remains problematic in this tradition, but it also must often be used even in the deconstruction of the restrictive definition of humanity, if only because, as in Derrida’s bricolage, there is no better tool (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” 285-286).
Two years after Luxemburg was murdered in Berlin in 1919, Taduesz Różewicz was born 300 kilometers to the west of her birthplace Zamość, in Radomsko, in 1921. Różewicz’s mother, Stefania Maria Różewicz, had been born to Jewish parents but had been raised as a Roman Catholic. Her birth surname, Gelbard, was a common name among other Jews of Radomsko, many of whom were killed at the Treblinka extermination camp. As for Różewicz’s language, for all the commonsensical Polishness of his writing and his person, both his writings and his biography reveal a deep familiarity with German language, philosophy, culture, public discourse, and political power.

From a biographical perspective, then, a formally similar figure can describe both Luxemburg and Różewicz: the writer of Jewish heritage who grows up in a provincial Polish-speaking town and becomes a globally read public intellectual partly through deep engagement with German culture, politics, and ideology. I draw this connection not because a Polish-Jewish-German life trajectory was unique in mid-century Central Europe. On the contrary, despite the anti-nationalist impetus of my analysis, I am suggesting that Różewicz’s post-1989 poetry comes from a historically and culturally specific subject position, whose members are numerous and whose history is long, that has produced its “own” critique of national human life. Without trying to tell the whole history of this tradition, I invoke Luxemburg in order to gesture towards its existence even at the beginning of the traumatic century to which Różewicz bears witness.

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11 See Praktyka Teoretyczna 2012, n. 6, which was entirely devoted to Luxemburg (Dziedzictwo).
12 Różewicz’s extensive interaction with things and people labeled German ranges from the tragic to the quotidian: during the Nazi occupation, his brother was executed by the Gestapo, the German secret police; his college major, art history, was still at the time a largely German discipline; the cities he lived in most of his life, Gliwice and Wroclaw, used to be the German cities of Gleiwitz and Breslau; his poems are littered with recognizably German phrases and sentences, often lifted from the German newspapers he read to the end of his life; his philosophical interrogations emerge straight from German philosophy; his 2008 book Nauka chodzenia / Gehen Lernen debuted in a bilingual Polish-German edition.
Picking up the thread of Różewicz’s eschewal of human and national abstractions, I can now examine Luxemburg’s writings on the same topic. In a series of essays in 1908-09, Luxemburg parses out the conflict of interests between the working class in Poland and the Polish nationalists. She was trying to account for the support that Polish nationalists had received among socialist discourse in Western Europe when they were popularizing their case for autonomy from Tsarist Russia. She argues against the Polish nationalists’ call for an autonomous Polish nation-state since the nation-state form necessarily reinstitutes capitalist systems that empower national bourgeoisies at the expense of national minorities and the economically disenfranchised (“The National Question,” 85). She does argue that the working class should be—and already is—attentive to cases of national oppression (96), and that the defense of the cultural freedom of ethnic nations is one of its interests (175). Yet the nation-state remains essentially capitalist in her analysis because its organizing unit, the nation, implies a false similarity of interests vertically across all the social classes that make it up. The distinct interests of the proletariat, unified horizontally, are masked and subsumed under the interests of the bourgeoisie in any society where power is distributed to putative nations, rather than to classes (135-137). Thus, successful nationalism—i.e., nationalism that wins a state for its nation—can only end in bourgeois expropriation of working class agency.13

13 Since the time of Luxemburg, the conflict between nationalism and socialism has been treated similarly as a complex point of conflict. In 1937, Richard Wright argued that African American writers should not disavow the nationalist character of their project, since it had been forced upon them through Jim Crow policies: “Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them” (101). However, he encouraged them also to take the perspective of the working class (103-104) in order to combat the bourgeoisification of black nationalism: “Negro writers can help to weed out these choking growths of reactionary nationalism and replace them with hardier and sturdier types” (106). More recently, Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities was written in order to account for nationalism as a phenomenon that Marxism underestimated: “nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted” (3).
One of the main tools of bourgeois power is linguistic abstraction, which Luxemburg opposes to the Marxist attention to practical historical description. She uses the opposition “abstrakcyjny”/“praktyczny” (Kwestia Narodowościowa 122) [“abstract”/“practical” (NQ 109)] to criticize the formula of “prawo narodów do stanowienia o sobie” (KN 114) [“the right of nations to self-determination” (NQ 109)]:

„Prawo narodów” stosujące się do wszelkich krajów i czasów nie jest niczym innym jak frazesem metafizycznym w rodzaju „praw człowieka” […]. Materializm zaś dziedzisty pouczył nas, że o treści realnej tych „wiecznych” prawd, praw i formuł decyduje każdorazowo nic innego jak materiał stosunki społeczne danego środowiska i danej epoki historycznej. (“Kwestia Narodowościowa,” 123-124) A ‘right of nations’ which is valid for all countries and all times is nothing more than a metaphysical cliche of the type of ‘rights of man’ […]. Historical materialism has taught us that the real content of these ‘eternal’ truths, rights, and formulae is determined only by the material social conditions of the environment in a given historical epoch. (“The National Question,” 110-111)

The mental slip of nationalist paraphrase—prioritizing the abstraction of the nation over specific human beings—bothers Luxemburg because it sidelines the specific interests of the working class. Like Różewicz, she considers the abstractions “nation” and “humanity” to be unhelpful, preferring pragmatic descriptions of the actual material conditions of specific lives.14

Banal Nationalism in Collective Memory

If nationalism were already a thing of the past in central Europe, it would be easy to think of Różewicz’s mistrust of Polish ethnic nationalists as a commonsense addition to his telling of

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14 In comparison to Arendt’s critique of human rights and Agamben’s critique of bare life, Luxemburg’s critique of the right of nations seems not to differ in its basic problematizing strokes. Luxemburg’s insistence on attention to material conditions parallels Arendt’s insistence on the importance of civil rights as the only effective guarantor of actual protection as well as Agamben’s resistance to a longstanding metaphysical division between two classes of life.
German fascist genocide. But the post-1989 writings reveal a preoccupation also with the context of his writings’ reading and transmission here and now, in the West to which Poland increasingly belongs, in a more peaceful and prosperous Europe, and in an increasingly connected global sphere. In this more proximate and current context, banal ideological forces including nationalism emerge as a treacherous receiving ground for the memory that his poems help to construct. The horrific historical narrative and the banal present-day context of its consumption occur again and again in tandem in Różewicz’s late poems, foregrounding the importance of the circumstances and stakes of reading, repetition, and translation.

One of the most important of these present-day forces, I argue, is nationalism, especially the variant that Michael Billig theorizes as “banal nationalism.” In opposition to the belief that nationalism is a fading force that no longer threatens an increasingly globalized world, Billig suggests there is still a complex of ideologies and habits in today’s established nation-states that daily and covertly reproduce them as nations. In asking why people in established nations do not forget that they belong to nations, Billig theorizes a mundane discursive “flagging” of nationhood in everyday communication. In established nations, he writes,

> there is a continual ‘flagging’, or reminding, of nationhood. […] In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being constantly waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed in the public building. (8)

The reason banal nationalism is not benign is that it tends during peacetime to prepare broad popular support for institutions of vast military power that become active at moments of crisis; Billig’s main example of such institutions is the US military. People who are constantly led to “remember” that they are part of a nation then mistake the defense of nations, as opposed to the defense of people, as the highest cause of justice. They support George Bush’s call to defend
Kuwait from Iraq, to adopt Billig’s example of the Gulf War, not as a defense of people who live in Kuwait, but as the defense of a nation (4). Once again, nations rather than specific people are imagined as the subjects of the conflict.

The concept of banal nationalism helps to frame Różewicz’s late writing because the speech act of the nationalist paraphrase—these people comprise this nation—succeeds more easily every day that the government of the Third Polish Republic continues to be recognized and respected by other states. As the legal measures providing for the existence of Poland continue to be respected, the need to wave the Polish flag slowly diminishes, and so it is hung quietly. Banal nationalism increasingly characterizes the nationalism of a given state as that state becomes more and more established, slowly replacing ethnic nationalism, but the discursive shorthand remains similar.

The radical eye that Różewicz turns to this phenomenon can be seen in his treatment of conservative US geopolitical rhetoric. The US is an important example of banal nationalism because it masks its nationalism as generous universalism: “US presidents, in defending their own national interests, can claim to speak for universal interests, or for the whole world order” (Billig 10). This can be seen in US presidents’ fondness for speaking for the interests of the “international community” (Billig 90). From a slightly different angle, Różewicz’s “Sobbing Superpower” lampoons the ideology of “compassionate conservatism” by narrating the 2001 George W. Bush inauguration as a pageant of self-congratulatory benevolence:

| Supermocarstwo jest sentymentalne czułostkowe współczujące („mitfühlender Konservatismus”) skłonne do łez „współczujący konserwatysta” trzyma rękę na biblii jest synem 41. prezydenta | The Superpower is sentimental touchy-feely compassionate („mitfühlender Konservatismus”) quick to tears “compassionate conservative” hand on Bible the son of the 41st president |
Abraham Lincoln looks on and listens
not even the downpour could

hide Bush’s tears

the Superpower sobbed

The president’s wife Laura wept

his twin daughters wept

the president’s parents wept

former president George Bush

and his wife—Grandma Barbara

By extending the image of a person weeping to the most powerful body politic in the world, this
passage highlights the oxymoron in the political ideology of “compassionate conservatism.” It
develops this contradiction by reporting details of Bush’s inauguration that hint at the limited
actual compassion of the president and his government. With implications of cronyism, the
focalizor of the poem notices Bush sheltering Cheney with his own coat, as they both sob in the
rain on the inaugural platform (Szara Strefa 80; Sobbing Superpower 262). Later, the speaker
paints a picture of hypocritical largesse by reporting the enormous number of pounds of beef,
ham, and shrimp consumed at the inaugural ball (Szara Stefa 81; Sobbing Superpower 63). These
details support the poem’s geopolitical argument: the immense power wielded by the US as a
superpower belies its rhetoric of benevolent intervention. Like Billig, Rózewicz is pointing out
how the US president’s nationalism uses the narrative of the essential generosity of the body
politic to cloak the way in which individuals have always already been consolidated into it.

As this poem shows, highly “developed” federations like the US are not exceptions to the
constitutive hegemony of the nation-state that Luxemburg theorized in the age of high
nationalism. Indeed, for Luxemburg, the problem with nationalism is not its ethnic determinism
but its maturation and implementation in official state policy. As soon as a nationalist movement
secures statehood, it becomes an institution through which the ruling class can dominate the
state’s internal and liminal others:

The nation-state is [] that indispensable historical form in which the bourgeoisie
passes over from the national defensive to an offensive position, from protection
and concentration of its own nationality to political conquest and domination over
other nationalities. […] This phenomenon becomes understandable only when one
takes into consideration the fact that, according to the bourgeois way of thinking,
it is possible to have a national movement for unification and defense of one’s
own nationality, and at the same time, to oppress another nationality (which is, of
course, contrary to the very ideology of the “nation-state”). (NQ 162-63)

After expanding the geography of her analysis to examples from around the world, including the
white US bourgeoisie’s oppression of African Americans, Luxemburg characterizes nationalism
as an imperious capitalist structure:

The strange double-edged character of bourgeois patriotism, which is essentially
based on the conflicting interests of various nationalities rather than on harmony,
becomes understandable only when one takes into consideration the fact that the
historical basis of the modern national movements of the bourgeoisie is nothing
more than its aspirations to class rule, and a specific social form in whose
aspirations this expression is found: the modern capitalistic state—“national” in
the sense of the domination of the bourgeoisie of a certain nationality over the
entire mixed population of the state. […] The ‘nation’-state [is] an apparatus of
the domination and conquest of foreign nationalities. (NQ 165, 169)

The pointed indictment “apparatus of the domination and conquest of foreign nationalities”
recalls the ideology and practice that Benedict Anderson calls “official nationalism.” Anderson
describes the phenomenon whereby popular nationalism, brought on by the imagination of
communities connected by print vernaculars, is appropriated by official powers and stretched in
order to fit their empires. Official nationalism is thus a means “for stretching the short, tight skin
of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire” (86). As state-produced phenomena, banal
and official nationalism can be seen as parallel, even though the theorists behind them have
chosen to highlight different aspects of the state’s nation-curating apparatus.
What is important in this analysis for post-1989 Różewicz is that between banal or official nationalism and literary works about the Holocaust lies the field of collective memory, always being reshaped by remembering and forgetting. Given the Polish state’s history of being erased by partitioning powers and occupiers, the field of national collective memory has been overwhelmingly competitive and defensive. More recently, after 1945, as Geneviève Zubrzycki has shown, the communist party played into the narrative of Polish national martyrdom in its narrative of the Nazi occupation of Poland. Zubrzycki analyzes “Auschwitz” and “Oświęcim” (the Polish name of the town near the camp) as the symbols at the heart of two diverging memories. Whereas Auschwitz became infamous around the world through the testimonies of survivors as a symbol for the Jewish holocaust, Oświęcim was molded in Polish-language public discourse into a shrine of Polish national martyrdom. This elision of Jewish subjectivity within Poland happened in large part through the design of exhibits at the State Museum Oświęcim-Brzezinka. They semantically obscured the fact that 90% of the camp’s victims were Jewish and foregrounded the Polish category of victims (98-112). This allowed the number of the camp’s victims, which had been exaggerated at four million, to “symbolize Nazi atrocities, Polish martyrdom, and the importance of Soviet liberation” (105). The official narrative of the site was not changed to emphasize the killing of European Jewry until the 1990s.

15 Speaking primarily of pre-1939 Poland, Norman Davies stresses the ingrained oppositional and minoritarian character of Polish nationalism:

Inevitably […] the strongest single spur to Polish national consciousness derived from political frustrations. It is a basic feature of human nature that people will develop an intense desire for whatever is denied them. They desire it, irrespective of their material needs, or of their original intentions. In strict contrast to state-sponsored nationalisms of Britain and America which have fed on a diet of confidence and prosperity, Polish national consciousness fed on deprivation and want. Like most of the other nationalisms of Eastern Europe, it may be seen as a negative function of the reigning tyrannies, and as such has frequently assumed a militant, even truculent air. (22)

16 This deliberate re-quantification of the numbers of the dead to appeal to the narrative of Poland as a nation-state resembles Benedict Anderson’s discussion of maps, censuses, and museums in official nationalism. Anderson suggests that these institutions of power reveal the imposition of a "totalizing classificatory grid" (184) that insists
It would be hard to find a more textbook example than this of what Michael Rothberg calls “competitive memory.” This term describes the belief that collective memory obeys a “logic of scarcity” (2), in which the public sphere is a scarce resource that needs to be seized and controlled: “the interaction of different collective memories within [the public sphere] takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence” (3). The example of the Polish nationalist memory of Oświęcim turns not just the public sphere but even the bodies of the dead into a scarce resource which can boost the preeminence of the nationality to which it is ascribed. The original postwar State Museum Oświęcim-Brzezinka subsumed the large number of people who spoke Polish but were ethnically Jewish into the category of the Polish nation, posthumously denying them the very identification for which they were killed (Zubrzycki 115). In the latest accounts, 90% of the 1.1 to 1.5 million people killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau are identified as Jews. Of these, 325,000 were Polish citizens. The number of “gentile Poles” killed in the camp has been estimated at 75,000 (114). In the larger narrative of World War II, however, Zubrzycki suggests that there still remains a “competition” of numbers. Six million Polish citizens perished: that is, 3.2 million Polish Jews and almost 3 million “‘ethnic,’ or non-Jewish, Poles.” Similarly, six million European Jews perished, including the same 3.2 million Polish Jews. In her own words, these numbers appear to place Poles and Jews on an equal plane of loss and suffering—adding to the competitiveness of Poles with Jews over who holds the ‘monopoly’ on suffering, a competitiveness heightened by the significant place of martyrdom as a root paradigm in the histories of both Poles and Jews. (115)

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on controlling the placement of classified groups of people on classified sectors of land: "The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions" (166). Together, maps and censuses exerted control over the categories of people "by delimiting territorially where, for political purposes, they ended " (174). Maps thus served as ways to make arguments about "tightly bound territorial units" (175) and as "logo-map" icons that would "penetrate deep into the popular imagination" (175). In view of this, the Auschwitz museum becomes legible as a project of official nationalism: the formal simplicity of the narrative of Polish victimization fits the fact of the camp’s location inside the map of Poland more seamlessly than the narrative of the extermination of the Jews, since they had no state of their own in Europe.
One of the largest problems with the quantification of the dead, however, is that banal nationalism still exerts its influence. The reproduction of the Polish nation-state from 1918-1939 is what makes the phrase “six million Polish citizens perished” possible in the first place. Even when historians are not required by an authoritarian government to inflate the number of Polish victims, the commonsense belief that even Jews had a civic nationality in addition to their ethnic and religious identity allows the Polish nation to reemerge as an equally victimized subject of atrocity. Without subscribing to the uniqueness theory of the Holocaust of the Jews, I still find the resilience of nationalism in this contest of memory to be demonstrative. The stakes are high for translating poems that address the Holocaust from a perspective identifiable as Polish, which includes the perspective of Tadeusz Różewicz.

Yet Różewicz, as this thesis attempts to show, imagines translation and memory as decidedly non-competitive or, to use Rothberg’s term, multidirectional. In this model, memory is seen “as subject to ongoing investigation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). To establish Różewicz’s interest in the productive, multidirectional transfer of memory, it is necessary only to return to his “dwa wierszyki” [“two little poems”]. While the one poem seeks to become a memento in the church of national memory, recalling Zubrzycki’s analysis of Catholic nationalist activity around Auschwitz, Różewicz’s poem “chce ciągle do

17 In his “multidirectional” model, Rothberg is interested in cases in which the memory of a given group has helped that of another to achieve expression or articulation. This even includes cases of Freudian “screen memory”, which “both hides and reveals that which has been suppressed.” Rothberg’s example is the way in which North American memory of the relatively distant Holocaust has sometimes served to “stand in for and distract from” the more disturbing memory of American slavery. In addition to acknowledging transfers of memory between collectivities, Rothberg resists the clear demarcation of the boundaries of the collectivities themselves: “I reject the notion that identities and memories are pure and authentic—that there is a ‘we’ and a ‘you’ that would definitely differentiate, say, black and Jewish identities and black and Jewish relations to the past” (4). To support his theorization, Rothberg undertakes a historical examination of the earlier stages of Holocaust memory to show that before it became competitive, this tradition of collective memory was characterized by frequent cross-references to the history of colonialism (18).
“always looks for human beings”]. In a post-1989 world that is embroiled in conflicts over national memory, Różewicz is interested in speaking to a new, un-owned human who is not filtered through the ever-constraining category of nationality, the erstwhile sine qua non of European bourgeois humanity, yet he is attentive to the ways that established states continually reproduce their empowered citizens as members of nations. The structure of this complex speech act is the topic of the rest of this chapter.

**Language, Nation, Translation**

The relationship between language and nation is much more complex than can be seen merely through Luxemburg’s critique of nationalist abstraction in linguistic formulae or the civic nationalism of established nation-states. In fact, the language-nation link will lead me in this section to the theorization of translation, since translation is often thought to be the process by which language is borne across the gap between nations. Taking up this triangle of concepts as my main interest, I will explicate several essays by Jacques Derrida. My aim will be to show that what is thought to be international or interlingual translation actually cannot be rigorously philosophically separated from many other linguistic activities that are known by names such as repetition, summary, paraphrase, revision, and quotation.

As a starting point, I will quote a passage from Michael Billig in which he draws from Benedict Anderson’s text:

The imagining of the nation is part of a wider ideological, discursive consciousness. For example, national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today’s common-sense belief that discrete languages ‘naturally’ exist. It might seem obvious that there are different spoken languages; but, this assumption is itself an ideological notion, which has been vital for the achievement of order and hegemony in modern nation-states. (10)
What Billig argues here is not that amorphous groups and publics never form around functioning semiotic practices that are depended on to function well enough in everyday life. Rather, he insists that the default category of nation with which such publics are constantly aligned has an ideological price. So, what is the alternative to national languages? Is there a way to revert to “natural” language before nation-states standardized the speech of their subjects?

Derrida discusses this question in *Monolingualism of the Other, Or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. In this part-memoir part-treatise, Derrida narrates his own linguistic status on the margins of France and the French language as a French-speaking Jew who was born and raised in the Maghreb. However, he quickly universalizes this marginal experience as constitutive, rather than anomalous. In fact, while his historical focus is the “nationalist politics of language” (57), his thesis that language is constitutively heteronomous (i.e. controlled by an external force rather than by the self) extends beyond the era of nationalism.

But before it questions the possibility that languages can be owned at all, *Monolingualism* first questions the consolidation of language—speech or linguistic signification in general—into countable, definable national languages. Derrida argues that the existence of national languages as such is a “trick” played by sovereign nation-states. The trick convinces the citizens of a nation-state that the words they speak are the domain of the nation-state. In the following passage, Derrida expresses this inherent domination, using “the master” to refer to sovereign Paris, the *métropole* of French Algeria, the “Capital-City-Mother-Fatherland” (41):

For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it, because he can give substance to and articulate [dire] this appropriation only in the course of an unnatural process of politico-phantasmatic constructions, because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very
fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as “his own.” (24)

I should take this opportunity to address instances of seeming hyperbole in Derrida’s Monolingualism, as well as similar passages in Różewicz’s poetry. In describing the widespread “homo-hegemony” of culture, Derrida writes that the colonial power “does not need, in its heart of hearts, to organize any spectacular initiatives: [...] genocides” (Monolingualism 40). He uses “colonial” and “colonialism” throughout the essay to refer to the linguistic education of children (38). Where Patrick Mensah has used “rape” (“Monolingualism” 24), Derrida uses “viol” (“Le monolinguisme” 45), which means either forced sexual activity or violation of a law or sacred place, to refer to cultural usurpation. In sharp contradistinction, histories of actual murderous genocides, exploitative colonial practices, and wartime rapes seem to transform this diction into tone-deaf hyperbole. Taken in itself, the word choice would throw into doubt the sense of perspective of the entire essay. However, one understands on reading the whole text that this extreme language has been deliberately used to undo the covertness of a banal structure that is far from benign, while not being in itself the thing most worthy of respect and attention. Immediately after using the word “genocide”, Derrida writes, “I will be accused of confusing it all. Of course I am not! But what if, while being attentive to the most rigorous distinction and respecting the respect of the respectable, we cannot and must not lose sight of this obscure common power, this colonial impulse” (40). It is crucial not to miss this “obscure common power” of homo-hegemony in language when considering Różewiczian translation, especially because it will tend to fade into the background of the texts to make way for the stridently announced power of Nazi Germany.

Różewicz too has written stanzas that are surprisingly minute in their application of the word “genocide” and seem as a result to be hyperbolic. The 1955 poem “In the Midst of Life”, which is usually seen as a statement of Różewicz’s post-1945 program, shows his attention to the problematic dehumanizing impulse in banal thought patterns:

Po końcu świata
po śmierci
znalazłem się w środku życia
stwarzałem siebie
budowałem życie
ludzi zwierzęta krajobrazy

to jest stół mówilem
to jest stół
na stole leży chleb nóż
nóż служy do krajania chleba
chlebem karmię człowieka

człowieka trzeba kochać
uczyłem się w nocy w dzień
co trzeba kochać
odpowiadałem człowieka […]

siedziałem na progu domu
ta starszuka która
ciągnie na powrozie kozę
jest potrzebniejsza
i cenniejsza
niż siedem cudów świata
któ myśli i czuje
że ona jest niepotrzebna
ten jest ludobójcą

to jest człowiek
to jest drzewo to jest chleb

After the end of the world
after my death
I found myself in the middle of life
creating myself
building a life
people animals landscapes

this is a table I kept saying
this is a table
on the table are bread knife
the knife is used for cutting bread
people feed on bread

man should be loved
I learned by night by day
what should one love
I answered man […]

I was sitting on the front steps of the house
that old woman
pulling a goat on a rope
is more needed
is worth more
than the seven wonders of the world
anyone who thinks or feels
she isn’t needed
is guilty of genocide

this is a man
this is a tree this is bread
Because language cannot be proper to (Fr. propre) to anyone according to a natural relationship, it is subject to usurpation by the sovereign. The national government’s material position of power allows it to write the history of the language of its subjects with itself as owner.

But ending with the critique of national ownership of language would still suggest that there is a way that language can be one’s own, that if the sovereign would only release its hold on the language of its subjects, their language would become their own. This is ultimately a false hope, because in language alienation is constitutive, not anomalous (25). The situation of “monolingualism imposed by the other” is the situation of every speaking subject, not just of those whose national languages have been interdicted in favor of another national language (39). This constitutive alienation is most evident in the formation of the subject, when the word “I” is spoken for the first time, because it is then that the speaking subject is forced to articulate the self with a word that enacts its identification with an other, with something outside of itself: “This I would have formed itself, then, at the site of a situation that cannot be found, a site always

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ludzie karmią się aby żyć</td>
<td>people eat to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powtarzałem sobie</td>
<td>I kept repeating to myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>życie ludzkie jest ważne</td>
<td>human life is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>życie ludzkie ma wielką wage</td>
<td>human life has great importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wartość życia</td>
<td>the value of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>przewyższa wartość wszystkich przedmiotów</td>
<td>exceeds the value of every object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>które stworzył człowiek</td>
<td>man has made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>człowiek jest wielkiem skarbem</td>
<td>man is a great treasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powtarzałem uparcie</td>
<td>I kept repeating stubbornly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Poezje wybrane 50-52)* *(Sobbing Superpower 75-76)*

Unlike Trzeciak’s word “man”, Różewicz’s word “człowiek” is not gender-specific. The “man” who “should be loved” can therefore also refer to the “old woman / pulling a goat on a rope.” As for the word “ludobójca,” which Trzeciak translates as “guilty of genocide,” it means a person who perpetrates genocide. By unequivocally stating that the person who devalues an elderly peasant woman is a perpetrator of genocide, the speaker is flagging the banal tendency to treat certain human beings as unnecessary. Like the metaphysical elision of specific human beings into “humanity” or “the nation” that bothered Luxemburg so much, the decision that they are not needed is troubling because it is the first step of a process ending in genocide. What Różewicz and Derrida have both done with the word “genocide,” then, can be described as a provocative reference to the obscure periphery of its occurrence. Less interested for the moment in repeating the spectacular and historically trumpeted fact of its documented actualization, its center, they are interested in making readers aware of its activity on the margins.
referring elsewhere, to something other, to another language, to the other in general” (29). The very word that a person uses to describe the self when speaking refers to a sign system—as well as its attendant cultural tropes and formulae—that precedes the existence of that person. This is the constitutive alienation imposed by language in general.

This is why the phrase “nationalist politics of language” (57) is not merely to be understood as the oppression of one nation by another, it being presupposed that nations as such exist. The nationalist politics of language is more banal than this: it is the assertion that languages are definite things that can be named and counted conterminously with nations: French, German, Polish, three distinct languages. Derrida thus speaks of a monolanguage, which is language without boundaries between languages, on the same page as he laments the loss of languages around the world by the hundreds (30). Language is unified across national distinctions in imposing itself on speaking subjects, and this is the first sense of the phrase “monolingualism of the other”. The experience of the monolingualism of the other

would be ostensibly autonomous, because I have to speak this law and appropriate it in order to understand it as if I was giving it to myself, but it remains necessarily heteronomous, for such is, at bottom, the essence of any law. […] The monolingualism imposed by the other operates relying on the foundation, here, through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogenous. […] To achieve that, colonial power does not need, in its heart of hearts, to organize any spectacular initiatives: religious missions, philanthropic or humanitarian works, conquests of markets, military expeditions, or genocides. (39-40)

The speaking subject’s experience of language is heteronomous, rather than autonomous; it is subject to laws that are exterior to itself.

Now, there is a deeper suggestion emerging from Derrida's essay, a second sense of “monolingualism of the other,” which he calls “a twist to [...] this a priori universal truth of an essential alienation in language” (58). The twist is that the situation of having always to work in
a language that is not one's own results in the emergence of a desire to “restore,” but really to
invent, a language prior to the language one speaks. The alienation of language is perceived as
negative traces of the prior-to-the-first language, and thus the speaking subject reaches out for it
(61). But because it never happened, it “can only be a target or, rather, a future language, a
promised sentence, a language of the other, once again, but entirely other than the language of
the other as the language of the master or colonist, even though, between them, the two may
sometimes show so many unsettling resemblances maintained in secret or held in reserve” (62).
This language of the other is different from the language of the other that is imposed on the
subject, because the speaking subject is drawn to it. It is a translation from nothing, an “absolute
translation” (61) or a “translation of a language that does not as yet exist, and that will never
have existed, in any given target language [dans une langue à l'arrivée donnée]” (65). Derrida’s
notion that the speaking subject is always translating from the future denationalizes language and
translation and even seems to free them from the “terror inside languages” (23). Yet he admits
that translating from the future is strictly impossible (9) and that “reappropriation always takes
place” (66). The need to improvise merely results in utterances that immediately need more
improvisation. This results in a seeming loop for the speaking subject, in which she constantly
flees from the language of the hegemonic other and tries to speak in the language of the future
other, but must begin again at once.

Translation thus conceived is closely related to Derrida’s concept of the supplement. Derrida
defines translation in terms of supplementarity in “Des Tours de Babel,” an essay in
which he performs an analysis of a classic text on translation, Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of
the Translator.” He writes that translation works according to a “linguistic supplementarity by
which one language gives to another what it lacks, and gives it harmoniously” (222). Here, the
languages of which Derrida speaks seem to be national languages, or at least distinct, countable languages. The supplement helps to show that translation is not rigorously separable from other linguistic processes like paraphrase, restatement, or even repetition, recontextualization, or citation. In fact, for Derrida, supplementarity governs the structure of language in general. In “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” it is made clear that supplementarity is a constitutive quality of language that is tied to the way in which structures are always “in play.” “Play” can be understood as the constitutive contingency of signifiers on constantly changing centers of reference. The fact that language is always in “play” is the reason that writing exhaustively about a subject, which Derrida refers to as “totalization,” is impossible. In the passage quoted below, Derrida is suggesting that play makes totalization impossible, and that therefore language should be thought of in terms of a constantly reappearing lack of total signification and a need for supplementation:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say—rigorously using that word whose scandalous signification is always obliterated in French—that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity. (289)

Play is constitutive of language, excluding the possibility of totalization and setting up in its place an infinite succession in which supplements are added as attempts to remedy the lack of a center on which to hang meaning. Attempts to remedy the lack are usually undertaken as if it were possible to meet the original exactly, “without remainder” (“Des Tours” 208), but this, according to Derrida, is impossible. Every translation will result in a new lack, which is expressed in the more hopeful passages as an opportunity (“Structure, Sign” 290-291).
There is one more dimension of this theorization that helps to establish why supplementation can usefully describe processes ranging from what is traditionally understood as “interlingual” translation to the mere repetition of a text: the dimension of time. A given “interlingual” translation must take into account more than the distance between itself and the original text in a synchronic bipolarity. It must also account for the continuing life of the original text—its diachronic maturation, transformation of meaning, and reception—since every text is always already in a field of play in which referents are not fixed. Interlingual translation must therefore be conceived of with an awareness of the fact that the temporality of both of the languages involved spells their constant change. Walter Benjamin articulates this imperative by speaking of the “post-maturation” of languages that surrounds the activity of translation:

> [J]ust as the tone and significance of great literary works are completely transformed over the centuries, the translator’s native language is also transformed. Indeed, whereas the poetic word endures in its own language, even the greatest translation is destined to be taken up into the growth of its language and perish as a result of its renewal. Far from being a sterile similarity between two languages that have died out, translation is, of all forms, precisely the one called upon to mark the post-maturation of the alien word and the birth pangs of its own. (78)

Derrida puts this thesis in a more compact formulation: “If the translator neither restitutes nor copies the original, it is because the original lives on and transforms itself. In truth, the translation will be a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself” (“Des Tours” 211). Far from being a process that is distinct from the original’s maturation as itself in the same letters and words, interlingual translation is an integral part of it; it is a “moment in the growth of the original.” This is why a period of poetry that is defined by its lateness, when the poet is in his old age, can speak directly not only to future “Polish” translators and editors but also to current translators engaged in the global transmission of Różewicz through various cultural and linguistic channels. Whether translation is conceived of as
diachronic or synchronic, intralingual or interlingual, intranational or international, the same
dynamics of structural play apply. Strict differences between types of translation are at least
unhelpful for a productive analysis of late Różewicz and at most overly dependent on nationalist
or essentialist ideologies of language as something that can be owned by a selfsame speaking
subject, a person who says exactly what she means or a translator who can uncover the real
meaning of the original text.

* * *

In this chapter I have tried to construct a theoretical lens that is Marxist in its attention to
the historical material circumstances of people’s lives and deaths and Derridean in its realization
of the failures of language as well as its embrace of the play of language. Using a series of
articles by Rosa Luxemburg, I showed that she and Różewicz share an impatience for the
tendency of bourgeois metaphysics to bury specific histories under abstract formulations such as
the “rights of man” and, more pertinently, the “rights of the nation.” Expanding on Luxemburg’s
analysis of nationalism, I adopted Billig’s theory of banal nationalism as a covertly powerful
ideology of world-creation that predetermines the ways Różewicz will be read both in the
prosperous post-communist Third Polish Republic and elsewhere in the world. Finally, using
Jacques Derrida’s theory of language and translation, I described the structure of translation to
include very broadly all forms of discursive supplementation. This theory of translation affords a
view to instances of narrative erasure, such as representing specific individuals as “the nation”,
and renders them legible as troubling phenomena that are still very much the stuff of 21st-century
Western life. It is to this alarming capability of translation that I turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 2. The Banal Erasure of the Horrific

I znów zaczyna się przeszłość
(szara strefa 27)

[And the past begins again]

In the previous chapter I tried to set up the double imperative of translation as the need to translate and the need to examine all translations for their political effect and I hinted towards its formal emergence in Różewicz’s late poems. In this chapter I will explore the category of detrimental translation, translation that is politically oppressive or ethically questionable. What is perhaps most alarming about this type of translation is that its origins or agents are not in themselves usually considered to be alarming. Rather, they are the economic and political institutions and personal linguistic habits that pass as necessary and harmless constants of social life in established and prosperous modern states. Subverting expectations, Różewicz interrogates these institutions by creating surreal narratives of violent translation, casting them as the agents that erase speech acts referencing historical atrocity. In “Recycling” [“Recycling”] (1998), businesses and national institutions are shown to restrictively “recycle” Holocaust texts in order to make profitable goods, erasing past deaths in workaday servitude to the present demands of business as usual. “The Professor’s Knife” [“The Professor’s Knife”] (2001) and a number of other poems formally train the reader to spot instances in which phrases or entire histories have been erased and supplemented through the thoughtless conversational habits of privileged speaking subjects. Other scholars have usually considered these poems in tandem as Różewicz’s most notable additions to his post-Holocaust writing. The theme of impossible representation has been the most constant preoccupation in analyses of these poems, but no scholars have yet
considered the significance of these problems of representation for translation, specifically.\textsuperscript{19} In my reading, these works create a weighty sense of the transnational need to rescue the voices of the dead from processes and people who otherwise make up normally accepted elements of present-day life in the “developed” West.\textsuperscript{20}

More than this, however, these poems show the Western interest in distancing the rest as undeveloped, troubled, and extreme. By uncovering the horrific in the banal, Różewicz is exposing the process by which the West re-instantiates its normality as antipodal to the extreme,

\textsuperscript{19} The most common interpretations of the first two sections of \textit{Recycling} concern the unendingness of the Holocaust and the impossibility of representing it. Building on Anglophone trauma theory and memory studies, Ubertowska considers \textit{Recycling} and \textit{nożyk profesora} in the context of the “second wave” of Holocaust studies developing in the 1970s and 1980s, but especially after 1989, when a new period of exploration about the “Jewish death” had only begun. She considers the “cryptographic trace” of identity in Różewicz’s long poems \textit{Recycling} and \textit{nożyk profesora} in order to argue that the poem reveals collective memory of the Holocaust as an illegible, opaque, and hostile sphere. This inscrutability of the history of the Shoah emerges through the figure of the unending “long poem, das lange Gedicht”, depriving both the historical event itself and its representation of an end. Andrzej Skrendo reads “Recycling” as the best example of the “poetics of recycling”, in which figures of repetition constitute variations on his theme of “transgression” and construct a postmodern landscape in which the history of the Holocaust has not ended (329-331). Dariusz Szczyzokowski reads the \textit{Recycling}’s bifurcated discourse as a statement about the impossibility of linguistic representation of the Holocaust (172-173).

\textit{As for nożyk profesora,} most scholars have seen it as continuing to develop the problematics of Holocaust representation, as Ubertowska does. Marcin Jaworski argues that the poem models a malleable model of memory in which remembering gives shape to the past here and now, making the experience of the Holocaust virtually inaccessible but necessary to try not to forget (131-142). Hanna Marciniak uses the tenets of trauma theory to explore visual imagery the poem, reading it as “secondary witnessing,” which is defined by trauma theorist Dori Laub as “the level of being a witness to other witnesses as well as the level of being a witness to one’s own process of being a witness” [“poziom bycia świadkiem świadectw innych oraz poziom bycia świadkiem samego procesu bycia świadkiem”] (48). The photographic nature of the poem indicates, for Marciniak, not the impossibility of witness or the aporia of speaking of death “from the inside,” but the mediated nature of the act of witnessing.

Some scholars focus on other aspects of \textit{nożyk profesora} without strictly connecting them to Holocaust representation. Piotr Bratkowski highlights the formal intertextuality of \textit{nożyk profesora} as immediately in conversation with earlier writings and asking for trans-temporal readings. Bratkowski also sees the knife as a symbol for poetry, since it too should pass over to the sphere of the concrete in Różewicz’s traditional antipoetic mode. Jarosław Anders reads the mixture of light and heavy elements in \textit{nożyk profesora} as an example of the irresolvable “inconclusiveness” that distinguishes Różewicz’s post-1989 work from the earlier poems (34). Michał Cichy sees in the poem an unsettling tendency to switch its vision of reality from the personal to the historical (the same switch I identify between the banal and the horrific).

\textsuperscript{20} If Różewicz is expressing hesitancy about the mundane institutions of established Western nations, this attitude matches the halting Westward geographic and political movement of Polish culture, language, and government over the course of the 20th century. During this process, it has been hard to assign Poland a place on either the center or periphery of worldwide economic, cultural, and political systems; its status in relation to the “West” has been ambiguous. Maria Delaperrière writes that in the postwar period, Polish writers had incentive to distance themselves from the European culture of the past because its paradigm of universal values had failed to prevent the Holocaust. Yet, many of them still inscribed themselves within it over the next few decades, maintaining a level of resentment symptomatic of a “syndrom peryferii” [“peripheral syndrome”] (31).
turbulent conditions of genocide, nationalism, and famine. The ideology of banal semiotic recycling is that horrific things like genocide happen over there, on the borderlands, not here, in the prosperous modern state, where a safe and open society thrives. The poems in which this recycling is narrated are therefore warning the reader about the covering act through which powerful institutions work to forget, deny, and erase the implication of the collective self, the banal nation, in the violence committed against those outside it.

**Institutional Recycling: Banks, Industries, and their Obscure Common Powers**

The 1998 poem “Recycling” invokes the familiar process of reshaping and reworking physical materials for new uses; however, this process relates uniquely to translation because it tells of old and new uses that are largely semiotic. In the section entitled “Moda” [“Fashion”], appropriative fashion trends from the 1990s are revealed as displacing the signification of clothing previously associated with the camps. In the section entitled “Złoto” [“Gold”], the monetary value attached to gold ingots in the world’s banks is shown as erasing the signification of gold teeth extracted from the mouths of concentration camp prisoners. I argue that the new uses of material are shown to be a horrific erasure and displacement of the previous instance in which they had been “used” as evidence of the camps. Thus, the poem becomes a dramatization of translational violence that commonplace modern institutions exert on texts bearing the witness of internment. Through this reading, *Recycling* becomes one of two main examples of the alarming potential of translation to erase what is most needed according to the silent, unannounced dictates everyday modern life.

In the “Fashion” section, a series of images rapidly appears of models sporting second-hand fashion trends and preparing for photo shoots. Many of the items of clothing, which are
described in minute detail, are manufactured so that they look like something retro or home made,

utkana tak, że przypomina
ręcznie udziergane przez babunie
kamizele swetrzyska czapki i szaliki
(woven to resemble
Grandma’s hand-knit
vests sweaters hats and scarves
(Sobbing Superpower 195))

With no warning, the text switches from these images to images that are understood in

Różewicz’s discourse to refer to the camps, creating the impression that the poem’s focalizor is experiencing flashbacks:

niktóre załatwiały się do misek
z których jadły zupę
(some of the women defecated into
their soup bowls”
(Sobbing Superpower 196))

As a result of the interspersion of images from life in the camps, the images of metropolitan European 1990s fashion soon appear as grotesque and tasteless appropriation. The women’s knit clothes that are too small for the model wearing them (zfr 93), the Russian soldier’s jacket (94), and the shaved head of the swimsuit model (96) all begin to refer within the poem to scenes of internment. The models’ clothes begin to serve as part the process of remembering something that is totally at odds with the economic desires of the fashion industry. The poem therefore reveals a conflict of interests between the capital-driven recycling of fashion and the reach of Holocaust memory. The choice of fashion is also telling: it is especially important for an industry that tends banally to govern the valuation of bodies to prevent the reminding of how Nazis devalued certain bodies. Such a link must be erased at all costs, if the fashions are to succeed as fully recycled products.

The “Gold” section constructs a similarly unsettling connection between gold ingots in large bank vaults and the gold possessed by Holocaust victims. By casting the national banks of Europe as the perpetrators of Holocaust denial, it incriminates them in banal nationalist
forgetting. It traces the erasure of the previous signification of the gold ingots and the
substitution of new markings:

dziwne znaki pojawiły się na sztabach złota w sejfach Riksbanku centralnego banku Szwecji złoto zaczęło płakać krwawymi łzami by ukryć ten fakt Riksbank prosił centralny bank szwajcarski o usuwanie ze sztab złota niemieckich znaków i zastępowanie ich pieczęciami szwedzkimi [strange signs have appeared on gold ingots in the safes of the Riksbank the central bank of Sweden gold started to weep bloody tears to hide this the Riksbank asked the Swiss central bank to remove all German markings from the gold ingots and replace them with the seal of Sweden]

(Sobbing Superpower 198)

In this passage, the processes of “erasure” (“usuwanie”) and “substitution” (“zastępowanie”) are explicitly named as deliberate forgetting. “Signs” that have become “strange” in their post-maturation are removed and replaced; the gold is translated from a signifier of the Holocaust into money, which operates according to a restricted economy in which semiotic efficacy is tied to the health of the market. Once the Nazi markings are removed, the gold loses its remainder, becoming a translation of a Holocaust text that has been designed not to refer to the Holocaust. It becomes like the floating refrain that occurs seven times scattered throughout the poem, in different forms: “a może / Holocaustu nie było” (zfr 99) [“but maybe / the Holocaust never happened” (Sobbing Superpower 200). The gold’s Holocaust textuality is contested because of its monetary value, and so the powerful institutions of well-established nation-states like Switzerland, Sweden, France and the US banally erase the trace of its previous life, preventing the remembering of further translations.
In addition to recovering the market-driven erasure of a recycled text’s remainder, the “Gold” section foregrounds recycling as shortening a text deemed too long to be of any use. Like the Holocaust denial refrain, the phrase “the long poem” appears sporadically seven times, sometimes seeming as though it has been added randomly. It appears in Polish, German, and even English, in both the plural and singular, and in verbal as well as nominal forms. Its reformulation in multiple national languages highlights the relevance of shortening for the question of translation. The last appearance of the phrase is in the “Gold” section’s post-script, where another foreign national form is suggested:21

PS

jaki to długi wiersz! i tak się dłuży dłuży czy to „mistrza” nie nudzi czy nie można tego zmieścić w japońskim haiku? Nie można. (zfr 105)

[P.S.]

what a long poem! it drags on and on doesn’t its author get bored can’t it all fit into a Japanese haiku? No it can’t. (Sobbing Superpower 205)

In these lines, the imagined reader’s complaint about the length of the poem contains the impulse to erase the unwanted parts of the text and consolidate it into a more economical form. In this recycling-as-shortening, there is a desire to shear off the remainder and to abstract the kernel of the poem from its texture of productive multiplicity, again restricting the amount of material available for future retranslations.

By the time this post-script voice asks for less to read, Różewicz has already set up the high stakes of abridging the Holocaust text by linking the gold nuggets to the bodies of the dead and dying. The poem builds several similes on top of each other in order to create this link. First, there is an extended metaphor that compares bodies and gold: the tightly sealed doors of bank vaults fail to conceal the German markings on the gold ingots, much as the tightly sealed doors

21 For a sustained treatment of the post-script form, see chapter 3.
of the gas chambers fail to silence the “zgrzytanie zębów” [“grinding of teeth”] and “stłumione krzyki” [“muffled cries”] of those within (zfr 97-98, Sobbing Superpower 198-199). Then, another metaphor puts gold and the long poem directly beside each other, and the poem is described as decomposing, recalling the earlier identification of gold and bodies, and completing the identification of poems and bodies:

sztaby złota rozmiękły [the gold ingots soften]
wiersz się wydłuża rozpada [a poem gets longer decomposes]

(Sobbing Superpower 201)

The notion that decay is present in the original poem draws out the sterilizing nature of the capitalist economy of recycling-translation. It suggests that translation hinges on the erasure of the notion that the material at hand is also the remains or remainder of something else.

Translation must in this economy conceal from view previous uses of the material; it must ensure its own use value by avoiding the possibility that the user of the new product would be reminded of the old one.

The textual drama of “Gold” points to the argument of this chapter, that Różewicz fears that the banal, obscure politics and economics of translation will always try to cordon off and restrict the violence of the Holocaust as something that happened long ago and over there, not something that is possible today, here. The newly recycled product is designed to convince its readers that their country is free of the kind of ultranationalist ideology that would lead to such violence. Much as the US passes its nationalism off as the exception to the nationalism of other nation-states, banalizing translation eliminates its own implication in the violence of other, former nations, languages, and histories.
Immediately after “Recycling,” a short philosophical poem appears on the next page that seems designed to comment on it. Its title, “Unde Malum?”, raises the question “where does evil come from?” [“skąd bierze się zło?”] (ZFR 116).

Skąd się bierze zło? Where does evil come from?
jak to skąd what do you mean “where”
z człowieka from a human being
zawsze z człowieka always a human being
i tylko z człowieka and only a human being

Here the speaker seems to be referring to “evil” actions taken by people, but later the focus narrows to words as the means of doing evil:

żadne stworzenia poza człowiekiem [human beings are the only beings
nie posługuje się słowem who use words
które mogą być narzędziem zbrodni which can serve as tools of crime
słowem które kłamie words that lie
kaleczy zaraża (zfr 117) wound infect (Sobbing Superpower 215-16)

Subverting the expectation that he would answer the question in reference to actions rather than discourse, the speaker refocuses the reader’s attention on the field of language. While preventing the origin of “evil” from being attributed to language rather than to humans, the speaker insists on the force of ideology even in its dormant, banal metaphysical reproduction as speech act, before it results in real material or physical violence. It is this ideological framing of the action that always becomes susceptible to erasure, in Różewicz’s imagining of restrictive translation.

Another poem from the same book, “z ust do ust” [“From Mouth to Mouth”], enhances this reading of “Recycling.” In this poem, ideology emerges clean and blameless from the philosopher’s mouth, but through multiple translations is transformed into an instrument of crime:

Ideja […] [Idea […]}
This poem tells a narrative that would fit any violence resulting from a harmful ideology.

Considered in the context of 1990s public discourse in Poland, it highlights the power of ideology to travel through instances of repetition and produce human violence. As a supplement to “Recycling,” it explains recycling as a harmful combination of ideological abridgment, forgetting, restriction, and erasure that produces a newly dangerous product. And behind the politicians, preachers, and activists who rework the “idea” into a “murder weapon” are the political, economic, and religious institutions that underpin the modern nation-state. The imperative arising from the poem is clear: mistrust any translation that allows the memory of horrific 20th-century events to be categorically separated from the closer, more familiar workings of societies that tell themselves they are “developed.”

**Personal Recycling: Lunch, Hygiene, and the Privileged Speaking Subject**

Whereas “Recycling” deals mainly with banal but coercive institutional translators, there are many poems that raise the question of the personal use of language by privileged speaking...
subjects. In this section I build on my reading of “Recycling” by analyzing poems that intersperse phrases and genre forms that signify comfortable bourgeois lifestyles with others that signify conditions of starvation and disease. In many cases, I argue, the poems are constructed so that the bourgeois structures of signification bury the inhuman or pathetic ones. Like the banks and industries in “Recycling,” the use of language in comfortable, prosperous settings is shown to actively forget its own connection to dehumanization and necropower, and thereby to cordon off the world of its own existence, the banal nation, from the inhuman one. This argument appears through an analysis of the long title poem “nożyk profesora” and a number of shorter poems from the post-1989 books.

In the surreal long poem “nożyk profesora” [“The Professor’s Knife”], fragments of narrative take place in an occasionally rapid, dreamlike progression of disjointed quotidian dialogue and events and starkly suggestive references to historical atrocities. Repetitive references to rust, trains, flowers, and graves replace each other in chains of supplementation that prevent a comfortable division between the horrific and the banal. In other scenes, the narration and focalization function to layer contradictory metonymies, such that alternate meanings displace each other rapidly in the course of a passage’s reading.

When visually and temporally coherent scenes do emerge, they do tend to support either horrific or banal settings. Some are recognizable as stages of the Holocaust: the deportation of Jews by train to killing centers, the thirst and starvation of interned prisoners, the furnaces in which the Nazis murdered them. In seemingly stark contrast, scenes also emerge that are recognizable as part of banal contemporary life: a freight train winding through a peaceful countryside, two old men having a breakfast of eggs and toast, young people flirting after one of them helps the other get a speck of coal out of her eye, a child expressing surprise to her parents
at a tree she sees, a man reading a book of poems, a professor doing work at his desk. Yet through the mixture, repetition, and variation of phrases belonging to both types of narrative, the poem frustrates the reader who is interested in keeping the banal and the horrific separate.

Figures, phrases, and lines that occur within stretches of banal narrative are suspected to belong to the horrific ones, and vice versa, and their ambiguity is held in unresolvable tension.

Perhaps the best example of these ambiguous figures is the image of the train. The first time it occurs, at the opening of the poem, it seems to be a part of a peaceful pastoral scene:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pociąg towarowy} & \quad \text{a freight train} \\
\text{wagony bydłęce} & \quad \text{cattle cars} \\
\text{bardzo długi skład} & \quad \text{a long string} \\
\text{idzie przez pola i lasy} & \quad \text{passing through fields and woods} \\
\text{przez zielone łąki} & \quad \text{green meadows} \\
\text{idzie po trawach i ziołach} & \quad \text{grasses and wildflowers} \\
\text{tak cicho że słyszać brzęk pszczoł} & \quad \text{so quietly the buzzing of bees can be heard} \\
\text{(nożyk profesora 5)} & \quad \text{(new poems 3)}
\end{align*}
\]

Subsequent stanzas also contain scenes of peaceful trains, though perhaps not the same one. One stanza presents the poem’s speaker calmly reading pastoral poems by Cyprian Norwid (1821-1883) on a passenger train to Berlin (np 7).

Other stanzas make explicit reference to Nazi trains. In one, the focalizer encounters the “gold train” that the Nazis sent from Budapest to Berlin to keep Soviet troops from capturing the valuable belongings confiscated from Jews arrested in Hungary (Progress Report). The most explicit passage anchoring the figure of the train to the deportation of the Jews crowds the names of death camps close together in four short lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
Pociągi odchodzą dalej & \quad \text{[The trains keep leaving} \\
teraz już z pamięci & \quad \text{from memory now} \\
do Oświęcimia Auschwitz & \quad \text{to Oświęcim Auschwitz} \\
\text{Teresina Gross-Rosen Dachau} & \quad \text{Terezín Gross-Rosen Dachau}
\end{align*}
\]
Much as the clothing and styles of fashion models began to refer to internment in “Recycling,” all trains throughout the poem begin to seem to be headed for the camps.

In a different passage, the poem seems to explicitly reference the controversial argument of Hannah Arendt about the “banality of evil” and Adolf Eichmann, the banal bureaucrat. The knowledge that Eichmann supervised the deportation trains gives a specific significance to the word “banal” in the following passage, where it is scattered along the poem’s description of a transport train, seemingly at random. Yet, the word seems to do more than just refer to Eichmann:

Eichmann:

pociągi towarowe
wagony bydłęce
koloru wątroby i krwi
długie „składy”
naladowane banalnym Złem
banalnym strachem
rozpaczą
banalnymi dziećmi kobietami
dziewczętami
w samej wiośnie życia

słyszycie ten krzyk
o jeden łyk
o jeden łyk wody
woła cała ludzkość
o jeden łyk
banalnej wody (nożyk 8)

[freight trains
cattle cars
the color of liver and blood
long strings
crammed23 with banal Evil
banal fear
despair
banal children women
girls
in the springtime of life

you hear that cry
for a single sip
a single sip of water
all of humanity calls
for a single sip
of banal water (new poems 6-7)]

---

22 The 1963 book covering the Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, grew out of her coverage of the highly publicized Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961 in Israel. From 1941 until the end of the war when he escaped to Argentina, Eichmann oversaw the deportation of Jews from all over Europe to camps in Nazi-occupied Poland (Niewyk 175-176). Arendt’s book has often been understood to argue controversially that Eichmann’s actions and psychology were characterized by banal efficiency and bureaucracy, rather than deep-rooted anti-Semitism.

23 Johnston translates “naladowane” as “crammed” in its first occurrence, but later as “laden.”
In this passage the adjective “banal” is coupled with a number of disparate nouns: with the abstract noun “Evil,” with the emotions of the victims, with the victims’ bodies themselves, and with the water they need to survive. This is notable, since usually the banal is that which is the most metonymically stable. Its attachment to disparate nouns heightens its strangeness, and the word begins to seem out of place. This is one of the formal qualities of the poem that teaches its reader to spot evil in banal scenery. The poem develops and cultivates the recognizability of certain symbols, such as the train, and then mixes those symbols with scenes of carefree life outside the camps, asking the reader to spot them.

The mixture of contexts is perhaps most pronounced in a scene on a train to “Treblinka”, which ambiguously refers to the name of the extermination camp and the name of the town. The first part of the scene tells of a girl who looks out of the window of the train car and gets something caught in her eye. The speaker, who is the passenger sitting next to her, offers to help get it out with his handkerchief. Then they talk:

- **już po wszystkim mówię** [all done I say]
- **ży wszystko obmyj** [the tears will wash it clean]
- **wycieram jej oczy** [I wipe her eyes]
- **oto sprawca bólu** [here’s the culprit]
- **pokazuję czarne ostre** [I show her a sharp black speck of coal]
- **ziarenko węgla**

- **pani pozwoli że się przedstawię** [allow me to introduce myself]
- **mam na imię Tadeusz** [my name is Tadeusz]
- **a ja Róża…jedziemy z Mamą** [I’m Róża . . . Mama and I]
- **z Teresina do Treblinki** [are on our way from Terezín to Treblinka]
- **Mama jest w wagonie restauracyjnym** [Mama’s in the dining car]
- **rozdzielił nas** [they separated us]
- **tamten wagon jest na końcu** [her car is at the other end of the train]

- **wysiadamy w Treblince** [we’re getting out at Treblinka]
- **wie Pan umieram z głodu** [you know sir I’m dying of hunger]
- **naprawdę umieram** [I’m really dying]
- **jestem taka głodna** [I’m so hungry]
- **że zjadłabym konia z kopytami** [I could eat a horse]
The dialogue gives conflicting evidence about what kind of train this is. On the one hand, the “they” who separated Róża from her mother, the barbed wire surrounding the window (in a line not in the passage cited) (nożyk 23), and the striking Terezín-Treblinka itinerary announce the mechanisms of the Holocaust. In this historical reading, this girl is being forcibly transported by the Nazis from the “model ghetto” of Theresienstadt that was in operation near Prague until October 1944 to the Treblinka killing camp northeast of Warsaw. This itinerary is actually very plausible, since there were frequent deportations from the Theresienstadt to camps farther east, such as Treblinka (Niewyk 17). With this context, given the starvation conditions of Theresienstadt, the phrase “I’m dying of hunger” can only be read as literal and tragic. But on the other hand, the presence of a “dining car,” and the suggestion that passengers on this train are free to get off at stops that are not Treblinka, constitute evidence that this is a normal passenger train. Understood as taking place in this kind of reality, the phrase “I’m dying of hunger” is a banal though darkly coincidental hyperbole.24 The dreamlike unreality of the poem, created by contradictory metonymic details, both heightens and frustrates the reader’s desire to establish whether or not these stanzas are about the Holocaust.

The heightened attention to what certain phrases might also mean develops into a habitual impulse to search for the remainder that has been hidden by the primary signification of the utterance at hand. Rosa’s statement, “I’m dying of hunger,” remains the best example, given the metonymic connection of hunger to potatoes to the professor’s knife, the poem’s main

24 The same applies to the speaker’s use of the word “culprit” to describe a speck of coal; the possible actual culprits of Rose’s larger suffering remain unnamed.
focalized object. The speaker of the poem reveals what this knife is slowly over the course of the poem. He first encounters it on the professor’s desk, among art history books and sheets of paper: “dziwny nożyk – pomyślałem –” (nożyk profesora 18) [“strange knife – I thought” (new poems 18)]. The workaday academic environment renders the knife “strange” to the poet-focalizor. Just from looking at it, he can tell that it came from a death camp, despite its minimalist make out of the iron hoop of a beer barrel (nożyk profesora 17; new poems 17):

- spojrzałem na nożyk  
- mógł służyć do krojenia chleba  
- nożyk z żelaznego wieku  
- – pomyślałem – z obozu zagłady (nożyk profesora 25)  
  [I looked at the knife  
  it could have been for cutting bread  
  a knife from the iron age  
  – I thought – from a death camp (new poems 25)]

The focalizor-narrator then guesses that his professor friend now uses it to open envelopes and that in the camp he used it to peel potatoes:

- no tak – powiedział profesor  
- obierki mogły uratować  
- od śmierci głodowej (nożyk profesora 19)  
  [that’s right – said the professor  
  potato peelings could save you  
  from dying of hunger” (new poems 18)]

“Dying of hunger” is the linguistic index that corresponds to the professor’s knife. In the camp, it meant actual death; translated into a life of relative prosperity and peace, it still refers to the camp, but is beginning to be erased by hyperbolic usage. By foregrounding the stakes of recontextualization in mundane postwar life, the poem trains the reader’s attention on banal signs as having been banalized, as one variant of the train image has it: “ładowne zbanalizowanym złem” (nożyk profesora 16) [“laden with banalized evil” (new poems 15, italics mine).

The image of “dying of hunger” appears also in a later poem, “Katar w Chinach” [“A Cold in China”], which resituates the banal/horrific opposition in the context of the Great Leap
Forward in China at the end of the 1950s. In the poem, Różewicz and other artists from Poland are on a visit to China in 1958. In the lobby of their hotel, Różewicz (the poem’s speaker) and another artist, Witold Z., are shocked when the painter “Nacht” decides to go home because he has a cold:

Witold Z. stał z rozchylonymi ustami z szeroko otwartymi niebieskimi (wtedy) oczami patrzał na mnie na jego twarzy malowało się nieme pytanie „wielki skok” a jeden człowiek z Warszawy ma katar więc nie zwraca uwagi na to drobne wydarzenie (szara strefa 69)

Witold Z. stood with gaping mouth and eyes (still blue then) wide open he looked at me on his face there appeared a wordless question the “great leap forward” and one little fellow from Warsaw had a cold and so was paying no attention to this minor event (new poems 107)

In these lines, Witold is shocked that someone would choose to ignore an event affecting millions of lives just because he has a cold. Yet, the phrase “minor event” does not necessarily extend to the Great Famine that caused tens of millions of deaths. Because the date is 1958, Witold’s shock must be rather at how little perspective Nacht has of the cultural-ambassadorial stakes of the situation: a fellow communist state is in its moment of glorious collectivization and Nacht is failing to represent the People’s Republic of Poland in deference. Strangely, the two specific meanings of understatement compete for prominence in the phrase, creating a tension that foregrounds the erasure of atrocity by more mundane political intrigue.

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25 In 1957, Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party planned a rapid advancement of economic policies, including the collectivization of farms and the urbanization of labor forces for iron and steel production. The plan was a catastrophe, resulting in widespread famine over the years 1959-1961, after which the system was decentralized again in 1962. Over the four-year period, the implementation of the Party’s policy caused an estimated 23 million excess deaths (Peng).
In another scene, the problem of famine is developed when references to it are erased by references to lunch. When Witold Z. and Różewicz are eating lunch in the restaurant car of a train from Peking to Shanghai, Witold Z.’s irritation at being hungry is followed immediately by the focalization of a scene of poverty and unsanitary conditions beside the train tracks:

był głodny… he was hungry . . .
bardzo się zirytował, he was most upset
że dostalem obiad wcześniej […] that I got my lunch first […]

wzdłuż torów widać było along the tracks there could be seen
wypróżniających się ludzi people defecating
zwróconych uśmiechniętą twarzą do pociągu facing the train and smiling
   (szara strefa 69-70)

The scene of defecation appears through the window to two artists eating lunch, blindsiding the scene’s sense of banal referentiality with the stakes of extreme poverty. These two references—to the exaggerated hunger of a well-fed European subject and to material conditions that expose the subaltern body to disease—complete two of the poem’s more obvious references: the hypochondriac painter’s cold and the white elephant of catastrophic famine. These references become legible in the collision of horrific and banal that Nożyk profesora established, allowing the subaltern’s famine and disease to be shown under erasure by the expressions of discomfort of privileged European subjects.

References that are at once banal and horrific emerge in a surprising number of poems. In “Budzik” [“Alarm Clock”], four potential narratives are woven together, two banal and two tragic, but the banal ones conceal the tragic ones, preventing them from becoming the main focus
of the poem. When the speaker begins to think about the alarm clock, which the title of the poem presents as important, his mind wanders to the Hundred Flowers Campaign:

- słucham „tykania” zegara
- to jest stary budzik
- wyprodukowany w Chinach
- (Shanghai – China)
- jeszcze za życia Wielkiego Sternika
- który pozwolił kwitnąć stu kwiatom
- 55ebri szkół artystycznych wezwał
- do współzawodnictwa
- potem była rewolucja kulturalna
- (szara strona)

I hear a ticking
it’s my old alarm clock
made in the PRC
(Shanghai – China)
when the Great Helmsman was still alive
he let a hundred flowers bloom
and challenged a hundred schools of art
to compete
then came the cultural revolution
(new poems 71)

Despite seeming to name a dark historical moment and attach it to the index of the alarm clock, this short account of the Hundred Flowers Campaign does not actually mention the 1957 crackdown, it only implies it with “then” and the euphemism “rewolucja kulturalna” [“cultural revolution”]. It therefore resembles “nożyk profesora” in making mundane objects speak for tumultuous history, and in demonstrating the problematic referentiality of doubly signifying signs.

The other two narratives unwind from the self-reflexive observation that Różewicz uses to open the poem:

- jak ciężko jest być pasterezem umarłych (szara strona)
- the shepherd of the dead (new poems 71)

Of what dead is Różewicz the pastor? These lines recall the 1950s poem “Rehabilitacja pośmiertna” [“Posthumous Exoneration”] in which Różewicz represents the dead judging the living, not one of whom is innocent of their murder:

- Umarli przypominają sobie naszą obojętność
- The dead recall our indifference

---

26 This refers to the Party’s liberalization campaign in 1956, in which it encouraged citizens to share their true opinions about the Party, even if they were critical. Then, in 1957, as the criticism began to mount, the Party cracked down suddenly and imprisoned many artists and intellectuals who had spoken freely (Hundred Flowers).
But the next lines immediately snatch away this reading, replacing it with the image of a long-lived writer being asked to take part in the multiplying funerals of elderly acquaintances:

- co rusz
- żywi proszą
- abym napisał „coś” „drobiazg”
- o kimś kto umarł
- odeszł zasnął
- spoczywa (szara strefa 30)

at every step
the living ask of me
to write “something” “a few words”
about someone who has died
departed passed away
is resting in peace (new poems 71)

The softness of the words used for death allows these “dead” to stand in stark contrast with the “dead” of the 1955 poem. Those other dead, the dead of the Holocaust, glimmer only for a moment as provisional signifieds before being replaced by those who have “passed”, the peacefully dead who crowd any person’s life if it lasts as long as Różewicz’s did.

The extraordinarily conflicted poem, “Ucieczka świniek dwóch” (“Escape of the Two Little Piggies”), can serve as a final example. This piece dramatizes the boundary of lighthearted children’s narrative and historical terror. It tells of the escape from internment, benevolent protection, and subsequent legal commodification, seizure, and slaughter of two pigs. Its use of playful nursery rhyme tropes serves as a sharp counterpoint to the ambiguity of the pigs’ metaphoric humanity and the ethics of their legal commodification. While the main title sets the tone of a children’s fairy tale, the parenthetical subtitle “(z obozu zagłady – rzeźni)” [“(from the slaughterhouse death camp)” (new poems 114)] announces the gravity of their internment, giving the pigs an allegorical signification. When the scene is set in England in the first stanza, the reader receives a first hint that the heavily guarded boundary of humanity is significant: references are made to the cloning of sheep, the modification of cows’ milk for human infant consumption, and madness caused by the consumption of offal (this line is also in conversation
with “Meat” in “Recycling”) (SzS 76; new poems 114). Furthermore, the pursuit of the pigs has
the metonymic detail of a technocratic security state, though it is banalized by sing-song rhyme:

ruszyły w pogoń straże psy
śmigłowce
beczały na łące
sklonowane owce (szara strefa 76)

[guard dogs and helicopters
gave chase on land and sky
while flocks of cloned sheep
stood bleating nearby” (new poems 114)]

The helicopters and guard dogs evoke very recent scenes of internment, bringing the
“slaughterhouse death camp” troublingly into the present. Yet the presence of rhyme prevents a
solemn tone from developing. Unlike many other poems that show witness under erasure, this
one works to keep multiple systems of referentiality fully in play, announcing their competition
and irreconcilability. It makes the clash between a lifestyle where there are nursery rhymes and
the lived conditions of internment clear, repeating the warning to watch for bourgeois language
that creates a world apart from those outside its interest.

* * *

In this chapter, I have tried to elucidate a reading of Różewiczian recycling. In this
reading, recycling figures the processes whereby institutions and individuals in banal contexts
make a translation exclusively their own by destroying the semiotic structures pointing to
spectacular atrocity. In the terms of Derridean translation, recycling figures not only the
displacement of an old text by a new one but also the attempted erasure of the trace of that
process of displacement, to produce a clean, totalized, whole, and autonomous new text, with no
remainder. Such restricted, totalizing translation is in fact impossible to achieve, for Derrida, but
recycling figures the attempt to achieve it. The attempt itself is a problem in the discourse of
Holocaust memory: totalizing recyclings of the Holocaust in fact risk giving the reader the
impression of understanding it all, of owning it. For all their ostensible clarity, they produce
overconfident readers who then believe they have the answers and can already stop asking
questions. This allows the recycled memory to crystallize into a world constituted on its
difference from the world of evil it understands the Holocaust to be. And readers who are sure
what the Holocaust is are always the quickest to move beyond it, to forget it, to stop translating it
into iterations that will challenge them, and finally to reconstitute worlds and nation-states that
actually do repeat it. Confident that they understand what it is, they will mundanely deny the
implications of their collective civic subject in the exclusion of the peripheral other, ignoring the
conditions of life of Luxemburg’s working class subject whose humanity is elided by the
privileging of the abstract, collective bourgeois nation-subject. This awareness of the detrimental
potential of translation constitutes one part of what I have called the translational double
imperative. I will turn in the next chapter to the second part, the necessary continuation of
translation as a process of remembering the past and speaking to the material and social needs of
the present.
Chapter 3. Gray Supplementarity

To, co moi „krytycy” lub „koledzy po piórze” oceniali jako „powtarzanie się”… – mówili: „Tadeusz R. się powtarza” – to była i może jeszcze jest najcenniejsza rzecz w całej mojej twórczości. Uporczywe przerabianie, powtarzanie, wracanie do tej samej materii i tak… aż do końca. Inne rzeczy będzie już pisał inny człowiek. Inaczej nie można. Albo wpada się w literacką „gadaninę”.
—T. Różewicz, 1957 (Matka odchodzi, 88)

[What the ‘critical’ or ‘literary’ ‘fraternity’ labeled ‘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. Or you end up with literary chit chat.
—T. Różewicz, 1957 (Mother departs, 88)]

As the last chapter showed, Różewicz’s late poetry is intensely aware of the troubling possibilities of certain practices of translation. However, despite this alarm, the poems also convey the need to keep translating anyway. In fact, any attempt by Różewicz or a translator to maintain proper ownership of the poems—to keep them from being translated further—would run the same risk as the detrimental translations figured in the last chapter. Just as the Holocaust must be witnessed, the texts thus produced must be reworked if they are to survive. This is the additive, necessary side of translation, involving the ways translation does often result in a meaning being communicated, even though it is impossible to reproduce the meaning of the original. To bring out this hopeful supplementarity, I analyze the frequent formal division between body and post-script that occurs in many poems in the post-1989 period as a figure of the writer’s inability to stop writing. Then, I consider the grayscale that recurs increasingly toward the end of Różewicz’s last major book, wyjście [exit], as a way of prompting the reader to supplement the text at hand. By modeling translation and inviting the reader to continue writing his poems, Różewicz is embracing the process that will allow his work to survive as future translators reattach it to the material and social conditions of its unforeseen moments of reading.
Graphomania and the Post-Script Supplement

One of the most striking features of the post-1989 poems is an ending section that is set off by the header “P.S.”, for “post scriptum.” Both in English and Polish, these two letters signal an addendum to a text that has already been closed, often with a signature. Because the post-script form tries to make a text more complete and at the same time reveals that it was not yet complete, it foregrounds the speaker’s struggle with the impossibility of totalizing the field of discourse. It foregrounds the need to keep writing and keep translating.

In many of these poems, it can be hard to resist the impression that the post script summarizes and condenses the poem it follows, since it often contains a pithy statement that begs to be read as the point or punch line of the poem. It seems to summarize it and in doing so replace it. For example, “Szkoda” [“Pity”] discusses Ezra Pound’s thought and writing and makes a plethora of literary references over 41 lines; however, it does not use the word “szkoda” until the post-script, which seems to clarify the entire text:

| P.S.                               | [PS
| szkoda że Pound nie przeczytał      | pity Pound didn’t read
| Mein Kampf                          | Mein Kampf
| zanim zaczął chwalić                | before he started to praise
| Führera                             | the Führer |

By seeming to communicate what is in the poem more clearly than the poem does, the post-script questions the sufficiency of the poem’s own words. It invites the reader into the game of summarizing the poem’s meaning as an extractable message. The necessary side of the theory of translation thus emerges: the original not only can be reworked but must be reworked; both the poet and the readers must always be reaching out for the impossible “future language,” as Derrida describes it (“Monolingualism,” 62), merely in order to think and make sense of words as they write and read the “original” poem.
An even more revealing instance of the post-script comes at the end of a poem located at Niagara Falls and set in 1991. In it, the speaker seems even to reference Jacques Derrida. The poem begins by asserting in what seems to be a playful provocation that water in stasis is an “aporia”:

na stole stoi w garnuszu
a może garnuszek z wodą
(garnuszek wody?)

woda stoi na stole
oto pierwsza APORIA *(zf 65)*

By describing the physics of water with a word that refers in Derridean discourse to the point at which two independently sound systems of logic cross, he seems to be setting up a logical comedy. The tension rises as he stands watching Niagara Falls. When an idea for a short poem strikes him, his mental state becomes unstable:

napiszę krótki wiersz
i w tym małym wierszu
zamknę Wodospad
jak w butelce
zakorkuję kropkę

w porę „połapałem się”
for a minute I had it “figured out”

w porę to znaczy
for a minute I mean
zanim ogarnęło mnie szaleństwo
until madness overwhelmed me
zanim wszedł we mnie demon
until the demon of poetry
poezji
rose up in me
w postaci francuskiego grafomana
in the form of a French graphomaniac
(postać w Polsce nieznana)

stałem tam jeszcze długo
I stood there still longer
przychodziłem do siebie
I came to my senses
godziłem się z Rzeczywistością
I faced up to Reality
z Wodospadem
to the Waterfall
który spadał wyjaśniał
which in falling clarified
określał możliwości i formę
defined the possibilities and form
mojej poezji *(zf 67)*
of my poetry]
The speaker’s thought patterns in these lines reveal the profound anxiety with which he considers the end of the poem, its “kropka” [“period”]. In reaction to the idea of a contained, corked poem, he is seized mentally by the prospect of graphomania, “a mania for writing” (OED). Moreover, through the otherwise inexplicable word “French,” he seems to be evoking Derrida’s aporetic formulation of the speaking subject’s dilemma. In Derridean terms, it is clear that graphomania figures the writer’s recognition of the immediately developing lack in a work just “completed.”

Then, however, a third option appears for the speaker, suggested by the form of the waterfall itself, “spadając” [“in falling”]. One possible interpretation of this phrase is that the shape of a waterfall prescribes the shape of the poem. When the water has just left the edge of the cliff, it is consolidated and compact. The boundary between water and air is easy to make out. But with every second that goes by, the discrete boundaries of its shape become more amorphous as the water particles dissipate into splashes and mist. This image seems compelling when put in conversation with a later untitled poem that takes up a similar question:

mój krótki wiersz  
czasem się wydłuża  
dłuży  
w wymyka spod ręki  
więc go przycinam  
przeważnie u dołu  
rzadziej od góry  
bo w góry jest światło  
jest niebo  
są chmury  
są kłopoty z końcem  
wiersz nie chce  
się kończyć  
ciągnie się dalej  
nudzi marudzi  
mnoży słowa  

[my short poem  
sometimes grows longer  
lengthens  
ducks out from under my hand  
so I prune it  
predominantly from the bottom  
rarely from the top  
because on the top there’s the sun  
the sky  
there are clouds  
there are problems with the end  
the poem doesn’t want  
to end  
stretches out farther  
rambles whines  
multiplies words]
swój koniec odwleka  
delays its ending

do co zrobić z tym końcem (zfr 87)  
what do I do with this ending]

Here it becomes clear that the “dół” [“bottom”] or “koniec” [“end”] of the poem is what causes trouble. It is where, in the waterfall image, the limit is impossible to define.

This inability to end explains an untitled 1994 piece explicitly touching on the “nieskończoność” [“infinity”] of the poem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Na początku</th>
<th>[in the beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jest słowo</td>
<td>is the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wielka radość tworzenia</td>
<td>the great joy of creating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Po końcu wiersza</th>
<th>after the end of the poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>zaczyna się</td>
<td>begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nieskończoność (Plaskorzęba 13)</td>
<td>infinity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word meaning “infinity,” *nieskończoność*, has the same visible and phonemic root as the word for “end”, *końcu*, inviting the reader to interpret “infinity” as the unending-ness of the poem. The poem never ends both in the sense that it will last, having been written down, but also in the sense that the poet cannot possibly finish writing it. Especially given Różewicz’s old age, this seems to invite the reader into the position of writer, or translator.

Because he cannot end the poem, and must leave it to future writers to continue, Różewicz gives it a non-ending as temporary ending. This appears clearly in the post-script section of the poem on Niagara Falls:

**P.S.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Z dalekiego świata</th>
<th>from a land far away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>przez Ocean</td>
<td>across the ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dochodzą mnie głosy</td>
<td>voices are telling me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**że dzieci Apollina**

**występuje tam**

**„przeciw poezji niezrozumiacej”**

**przedmiot ten**

that the children of Apollo

are stepping out

“against unintelligible poetry”

I once tried to work out
Here the speaker-poet directly references his attempt in the late 1940s and 1950s to strip his poems of anything that would impede their message. Then, the last stanza overlays the two scales of the poem’s discussion onto one another: the small problem of Różewicz ending a poem, and the large problem of his life’s writing ceasing to convey its witness. Poetry becomes unintelligible both in its ending and in the end. In the comparison of these two senses of the phrase, it becomes clear that Różewicz views his late writing as a post-script itself. Forty-four years after his writing first left the cliff, he sees it has turned into mist. This realization results
not in the attempt to write poems that are even more solid than the ones from the 1940s and 1950s, since such poems would deteriorate too. Rather, the aging poet resorts to post-scripts that draw attention to the lack that is already inherent in them.

The curious nature of the post-script is that it splits the boundary of the poem in two, like the end of a waterfall. At the poem’s first ending, before the post-script, it is incomplete because the post-script is a part of it. With the post-script, however, it is more than complete, because its end preceded the addendum. In this way the Różewiczian poem that has a post-script has the quality of mana, as Derrida uses the term. Mana, the overabundant signifier, is so radically contingent on its supplement that it can take on any signification. In Derrida’s words, “the function of notions like mana is to be opposed to the absence of signification. / The overabundance of the signifier, its supplementary character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be supplemented” (290). The post-scripted poem is especially overabundant because its post-script signals its finitude, its radical ending and inability to signify beyond itself without a supplement, an addendum, a translation.

The Overabundant Gray Zone

Throughout the post-1989 period, but especially in szara strefa (2002) [gray zone] and wyjąście (2004) [exit], the grayscale of black, gray, and white appears repeatedly. In many poems, the potential significances of these colors or non-colors proliferate quickly: black and white could signify evil and good, guilt and innocence, horror and banality, death and life, or race. Gray could signify ethical ambiguity, or a meaningless non-text such as static on a screen or white noise from an electronic speaker. When this grayscale is theorized in relation to translation, the transitions between various shades of gray become significant as differences
between translations. Does a given translation whiten or blacken a text, mix its black and white parts into gray, or sharpen the contrast between elements that used to blend together into gray? When does the supplement, in attempting to provide what is lacking, alter the grayscale of the original?

In the terms of the grayscale, the troubling recycling of fashion and gold that I analyzed in the last chapter was no doubt artificially whitening or blackening its texts, and erasing the gray. In this chapter, however, I will consider poems that present gray as a formally pronounced semantic lack. Whereas in the last chapter banal metonymies were shown to sharpen the contrast between the present and the past and erase the grayness of the Holocaust, in this chapter, the poems analyzed demonstrate formally that the reader’s own action through supplementation is vital to creating a text that means something at all.

The most extended treatment of the grayscale occurs in the title poem “szara strefa” [“gray zone”]. Even the words that serve as its title can mean several specific and unrelated things. First, within Holocaust memory, “the gray zone” has developed a special meaning ever since it was used as the title of Primo Levi’s chapter on the difficulty of distinguishing Nazi victims and perpetrators in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989). This phrase also serves as the

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28 Primo Levi’s “gray zone” describes the status between victim and perpetrator, in which certain victims gain privilege as the “armature” of the acts set in motion by the sovereign power. The most demonstrative example of the gray zone is the activity of Sonderkommandos, the “special squads” who operated the gas chambers and crematoria (Meierhenrich 369). Yet Levi suggests that the gray zone was not an atypical ethical realm that only a few prisoners inhabited, but the governing logic of survival in the camps: “The world into which one was precipitated was terrible, yes, but also indecipherable: it did not conform to any model; the enemy was all around but also inside, the ‘we’ lost its limits, the contenders were not two, one could not discern a single frontier but rather many confused, perhaps innumerable frontiers, which stretched between each of us” (Meierhenrich 370). The language of frontiers in this passage is very interesting for what it suggests about the afterlife of Polish national memory of the Holocaust. To remember the Polish-speaking victims of the Holocaust (the “six million Polish citizens”) only as a unified representative of their nation is dangerous for the context of contemporary Polish nationalism because it is fundamentally misleading about the nature of the borders between the guilty and the innocent. The experiences of the camps showed that agency was especially confused due to a vacuum of power and the dire circumstances of daily life.
title of a 2001 English-language film by Tim Blake Nelson, based on the account of Hungarian
physician and Auschwitz prisoner Miklós Nyiszli, who was a member of the twelfth
Sonderkommando (Nelson). Yet, the Holocaust is not the only referent possible in Polish public
discourse. The “gray zone” could also refer to the parallel economy of the “grey market,” which
is made up of “nieewidencjonowana działalność gospodarcza, od której nie odpowadza się
podatków” (Dereń and Polański 784) [“unrecorded economic activity that does not result in
taxes”]. If either of these two senses of the title is understood as the correct one, the first line of
the poem follows suit:

moja szara strefa
powoli obejmuje poezję (SzS 12)
my gray zone
is starting to include poetry (new poems 51).

However, are either of these meanings of “szara strefa” and “gray zone” significant, given the
referents of the rest of the poem?

In the body of the poem itself, most of the formally prominent passages take up topics
that are related to neither of these discourse worlds. In a conversational tone, they playfully
explore what colors are, discuss visual artists who do or do not use colors, and address the
linguistic relativity hypothesis, which suggests that the languages different people speak affect or
even predetermine how and what they think; it has commonly been tested using color
identification exercises (Swoyer et al 144-161). These passages make the title difficult to pin definitively to either Holocaust discourse or economic discourse. Given the structure of the overabundant signifier, the phrase “szara strefa” is too much and not enough; it is too much because it is not enough. It fits worlds of discourse outside the poem very well, but the poem itself does not speak directly to those publics. In this way, it begs to be supplemented. Its title, as the threshold of its presence in the world, begs to be related to realities of the present and the past, to the receiving ground and historical ground of Holocaust memory, but the poem needs work if that relatedness is to be more robust.

On the very first page of Wyjście [Exit] it becomes obvious that the gray scale has a strong connection to the exit (death) of the poet. Yet this untitled, enigmatic poem resists a coherent semiotics of grayness: 29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>biel się nie smuci</td>
<td>white isn’t sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ani weseli</td>
<td>or happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tylko się bieli</td>
<td>just white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uparty</td>
<td>I keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mówi do niej</td>
<td>telling it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>że jest biała</td>
<td>it’s white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ale biel nie słucha</td>
<td>but white doesn’t listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jest ślepa</td>
<td>it’s blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>głucha</td>
<td>deaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jest doskonała</td>
<td>it’s perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i staje się</td>
<td>and oh so slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bielsza</td>
<td>it becomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powoli powoli (Wyjście 7)</td>
<td>whiter (new poems 127)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 For a recent account of this poem, see Węgrzyniak’s recent article. She sees whitening as a multi-functional sign which figures the “dying of senses, sensations, memory, and words” (171) and “wyjści[e] z szarości w strefę czerni/biely/cisy” (171) [“an exit from grayness into the zone of black/white/silence” (171)].
The many possible referents of “biel” [“white”] stymy any attempt to make sense of this poem inside itself. Like “szara strefa” [“gray zone”], it entices the reader to attach a definite meaning to the whitening of white by supplementing it and translating it into a more politically or historically relevant language. Yet these readings will only ever be far-fetched, since there is nothing or context that is completely defensible as a suitable supplement for the failure of the speech act. A reading of the poem could interpret “white” as an ideology that refuses to change despite repeated utterances directed into its field of discourse. For example, I could here translate “white” as “neo-Nazism”, creating a specific cultural and political commentary about contemporary European ultranationalism:

```
uparty
mówię do neonazizmu
że jest neonazistowski
ale neonazizm nie słucha
jest ślepy
głuchy […]
i staje się
bardziej nazistowski
powoli powoli
```

```
I keep
telling neo-Nazism
it’s Nazi
but neo-Nazism doesn’t listen
it’s blind
deaf […]
and oh so slowly
it becomes
more Nazi
```

Yet it is immediately clear that this translation somehow goes too far if it is meant to replace Różewicz’s version. Supplementing the word “neo-Nazi” would tie the poem much more closely to one cultural phenomenon, closing down the original’s multiplicity and erasing its formal invitation to further supplementation. Thus, what the reader decides “white” means depends precisely on the contextual apparatus that the reader brings to bear in reading. In this way, the poem demonstrates the need for continuous further translation that is sensitive to contemporary realities such as ideologies and political formations.
Elsewhere white is similarly treated as a lack to be filled when it is associated with the failure of language to signify. Words become white, and lose their meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polski</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>słowa zostały zużyte</td>
<td>words have been used up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>przeżute jak guma do żucia</td>
<td>chewed up like gum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>przez młode piękne usta</td>
<td>by lovely young mouths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zamienione w białą bańkę balonik</td>
<td>have been turned into white balloons bubbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>osłabione przez polityków</td>
<td>diminished by politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>służą do wybielania</td>
<td>they’re used for whitening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>żebów</td>
<td>teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do płukania jamy</td>
<td>and for the rinsing out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ustnej (new poems 129)</td>
<td>of mouths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the speaker attends to the banal recycling of words into the cheap clichés of politicians and young people, foreseeing the crowding out that threatens his poetry in a world of information.

This image of being drowned out in a sea of information becomes a crucial theme as exit reaches its end. It is first developed in the poem “Regression in die Ursuppe” [Regression into primordial soup”]. A narrative model emerges that speaks for the book gray zone and the one that follows it, exit. Regression, which on one level figures the childishness of old age, also names the drowning out of the signifying voice on a stage swamped by chaotic and meaningless language. After skipping shorthand through a narrative of evolution and human civilization, Różewicz the speaker narrates his own life:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polski</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wreszcie przyszedłem i ja</td>
<td>[finally I too entered the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na świat w roku 1921 i nagle</td>
<td>in 1921 and suddenly . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apsik! jestem stary zapominam okulary</td>
<td>atishoo! I’m old I forget my glasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zapomniałem że była</td>
<td>I forget that history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>historia Cezar Hitler Mata Hari</td>
<td>happened Caesar Hitler Mata Hari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalin kapitalizm komunizm</td>
<td>Stalin capitalism communism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Einstein Picasso Alka-pone</td>
<td>Einstein Picasso Al Capone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alka-seltzer i alka-ida</td>
<td>Al Qaida and Al Kaseltzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w ciągu 80 lat</td>
<td>during my eight years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zauważyłem że „wszystko”</td>
<td>I’ve noticed that “everything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zamienia się w dziwną zupę</td>
<td>turns into a strange soup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
– ale zupę śmierci nie życia
tonę w tej zupie śmierci
wołam po angielsku
help me help me
(po polsku nikt już nie rozumie)
(SzS 15-16)

– but a soup of death not life
I’m drowning in this soup of death
I cry out in English
help me help me
(no one understands Polish any more)
(new poems 55-56)

The movement in this passage is a retraction of the mental access of the speaker from history into the realm of his own immediate surroundings. History and physical objects appear mixed and commingled like a soup. The list form that is used to cluster proper names erases the distinction between the signifieds, rendering them vague, distant, meaningless, and “white.” The phonological conflation of Al-Qaeda, Al Capone, and Alka-Seltzer registers the crisis of referentiality felt by the speaker. Both the words and their referents blur into a soup of death. Finally, the reference to the barrier between national languages, and the dwindling efficacy of Polish, announce how dire the crisis of translation has become. How can these words be reworked so as to rescue them from the soup of nondistinction? If signs can only signify by being distinct from other signs, the souping of language hints at its failure, and its need for supplementation and translation.

As the book exit reaches its end, all the poems become a soup of referentiality in which all references become weaker. I cite at length in order to convey the reeling mixture of narrative and intertextuality deployed increasingly toward the end of the book:

w barze „Mona Liza” zakładano
na głowę kominiarki
i czarne rajtasy czyszczono
broń białą i palną
zaszczepnięto fundacje nie było
ubikacji
były
„naczelnik narodu” został bez wąsów
robotnicy bez skarpetek
polski Raskolnikow zabił
zamiast starej lichwiarki

in the Mona Lisa bar woolen caps and black tights were being pulled
over heads side arms
and firearms were cleaned
foundations were established there were no bathrooms
the former
“leader of the nation” had lost his moustache
the workers their socks
a Polish Raskolnikov
instead of an old money lender
profesora u którego 
killed a professor
nie „zaliczył” egzaminu 
who had flunked him
„Anioł” odszedł odszedł Boniek 
the “Angel” was gone so was Boniek
Moniek który szprzedawał ciuchy 
Moniek who used to have a clothes shop
odleciał z bocianem do 
had flown away with a stork to
Ziemi Obiecanej Romowie wyкупili 
the Promised Land the Roma bought up
wszystkie wolne działki na cmentarzu 
all the free plots in the cemetery
gdzie zamierzałem (sobie) 
where I’d intended to organize
urządzić „pogrzeb po polsku” 
(for myself) a “Polish-style funeral”
(wyjście 86-87)

This crowded passage, filled with references to Różewicz’s previous writing and beyond it to 20th-century history and literature, acknowledges the besidedness to which his work will be
subject in the chaotic intertextuality of the new century, an information century. But it also
creates the impression that this text is not even a text: it is a collection of words at some stage
before a text. Różewicz is giving the reader raw recycled material, already dismantled from its
previous textual products, and ready to be created into a new poem.

The argument that these poems are bewildering pre-texts emerges humorously in a
revealing poem near the end of exit, “Przecieram Oczy” [“I Rub My Eyes”]. It speaks to the
shredded textuality of the poems before and after it:

budzę się rano 
I wake in the morning
w jakimś kryminale 
in some jailhouse
bez krat 
without bars
gdzie jestem pytam 
where am I ask
gdzie ja jestem 
just where am I
widzę na gwoździu gazetę 
I spot a newspaper on a hook
poznaję po języku 
I see from the language
że gazeta polska 
that it’s a Polish paper
polska nasza 
our Poland
jeszcze nie sprzedana 
still unsold
nie w rękach Fortynbrasa 
not yet in the hands of Fortinbras
norweskiego Pana (wyjście 91) 
the Norwegian lord (new poems 213)
A newspaper, one of the most common vehicles of banal nationalism, seems to ground the speaker in Poland. However, the immediate reference to the future (“jeszcze nie sprzedana” / “still unsold”) and past (via Hamlet) as eras in which Poland might not exist undo the stability of this referential center as well. When the scene of waking up keeps repeating throughout the poem, the geographic and temporal center keeps shifting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>budzę się znów kraty</td>
<td>I wake up there are bars again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>przecieram oczy</td>
<td>I rub my eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ten świat wyszedł z formy</td>
<td>this world is out of shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jesteś w domu</td>
<td>you’re at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w swoim domu</td>
<td>you’re in your home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jesteś w Polsce</td>
<td>in Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>czyli nigdzie</td>
<td>that is to say nowhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>odwrócony plecami</td>
<td>King Ubu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warcyzy na mnie</td>
<td>growls at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Król Ubu (wyjście 92-93)</td>
<td>his back turned (new poems 214-15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The name King Ubu is a reference to the play by Alfred Jarry, which became “a rallying point for iconoclastic modernism” after its premiere in Paris in 1896 (Patterson). References to a plethora of political eras and partly historical dramas proliferate through the rest of the poem, reproducing the geospatial and temporal kaleidoscope that prompts the speaker to rub his eyes. Like the objects and signs around him, the words printed in exit are more convincing as items in a linguistic dumpster than as parts of a poem. The trashcan as a metaphor for the form of a text derives from Różewicz’s own theorization in the post-script to recycling as “a rubbish dump (information dump) with no centre, no core” [“formę śmietnika (informacyjnego śmietnika), w którym nie ma centrum, nie ma środka”] (Recycling, Howard and Plebanek, 64-65). As Różewicz exits the stage, he leaves behind a trail of cast-off words, inviting translators to take them up in play—perhaps even, as Derrida would say, joyfully.

* * *
Whether as post-script, language soup, gray zone, or trash heap, the figure of lack emerges across the two decades of Różewicz’s post-1989 writing. Prompting textual behavior that makes lack obvious, the poet models translation and interpellates his reader as future translator. Although he could have chosen to fall silent in his old age, he chooses instead to produce piles of overabundant signifiers, compelling his readers to speculate and supplement while reading to such a degree that supplementation becomes the main activity of reading. In the political context of collective memory and banal nationalism, this risky openness shows a hope for radical and unforeseen inventions of collective subjecthood that are developed with the wisdom of the memory of catastrophic codifications of collective humanity.
Conclusion

Returning to the question of world literature as an institution, I can only conclude that Różewicz is already a part of it and is also working to dismantle it. That is to say, Różewicz’s late work provides a blueprint for how the wisdom of his earlier work might mature accountably over time. From its early stage under the shadow of ultranationalist genocide, it is passing into the world order of nations in which national interests are masked banally as the international good. In this course of maturation, the texts do indeed travel in translation around the “world” of established nations, following Damrosch’s basic formulation. However, they also resist the appropriative recycling-translation that would domesticate them in established countries as texts that reassure those countries of their prosperity and humanity, in opposition to the rest of the globe. In line with Apter’s critique of World Literature, Różewicz’s poems impede “‘the drab hierarchization of petty-bourgeois desire’” (qtd. in Apter, 327) according to which Damrosch’s World Literature would catalogue them as so many UNESCO heritage sites. Somewhat disconcertingly for those quietists who would want translated poems to behave like museumized artifacts, Różewiczian world literature unworlds each world into which it is translated, since its interest is always to challenge the boundaries of humanity by which the collective self of translation, the nation or nations’ world, has constituted itself.

This explains how a body of work anchored by the critique of Nazism in Anxiety in 1947 has been translated into a body of work that is represented by the critique of US sovereignty implicit in the title translator Joanna Trzeciak chose for Sobbing Superpower in 2008. Trzeciak drew out and highlighted the part of the poet’s work that most directly challenged the United States’s self-worlding as an internationally benevolent nation. In doing so, she responded to both sides of the translational double imperative: she set the work into US English, enabling millions
of potential readers to make meaning of it; yet, she chose a title that names the very same cosmopolitan dominance of US nationalism-as-internationalism that will boost sales of the book as it travels outside the US to points throughout the heteronomous Anglosphere. If, as Jaroslaw Anders put it, “[Różewicz’s] poetry seems to take away more than it gives” (35), this is because its arrival in each nation-world spells the operation of a new bricolage.
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