Tadeusz Różewicz is one of the most important Polish authors of the 20th century. I say authors, not poets, prose writes or playwrights, because he was all in one. A contemporary Renaissance man. He wrote over 30 volumes of poetry, 18 plays, 8 collections of short stories. He also co-authored filmscripts. But the numbers are not key here, there are many more prolific writers. Key is the role of Tadeusz Różewicz in Polish literature and culture, which cannot be missed. He was a man who forecast. Who will remain in the history of Polish literature for one, two hundred, maybe more years.

He started early, although perhaps not, Dorota Masłowska for example started earlier. He was 23 and a guerrilla fighter with his brother Janusz – who was expected to be an eminent poet, but died in the war, when he published “Forest Echoes”. His proper debut, noticed by the critics, was in 1947, the famous “Anxiety”. And the last book published during his life is “This and That”, from 2012, two years before he died. Różewicz made his debut when he was 23 and died when he was 93, in 2014, so we can say he helped Polish literature to enter the 21st century.

For years he was perceived as a war poet. But he didn’t mind that. War, the catastrophe, trauma, apocalypse defined his whole oeuvre. Even when he doesn’t mention it directly, we feel he’s a posttraumatic poet. Resulting from war and the Holocaust. At school, he was presented as the author of two poems, “Survivor” and “Pigtail”, the former coming from the famous “Anxiety”. Here is the former one:

**Survivor**

I’m twenty-four  
Led to slaughter  
I survived.
These words are empty and equivalent:
man and animal
love and hate
foe and friend
dark and light.

Man is killed just like an animal
I’ve seen:
truckloads of chopped up people
who will never be saved.

Concepts are only words:
virtue and vice
truth and lie
beauty and ugliness
courage and cowardice.

Virtue and vice weigh the same
I’ve seen:
a man who was both
vicious and virtuous.

I’m searching for a teacher and a master
let him give me back my sight hearing and speech
let him name objects and concepts again
let him separate the light from the dark.

I’m twenty-four
Led to slaughter
I survived.
On the one hand, it is a huge catastrophe, it is a catastrophe for a culture that has nothing to base its material goods on. On the other hand, it is also a base, a starting point. And Różewicz’s poems from that time are, one could say, realistic poetry, poetry that wants to touch things, point out things, and maybe even just want to be a thing. Because everything else is uncertain. However, as I say, it is a starting point for a search. The subject of these poems wants to rebuild a ruined world. This famous formula "I'm looking for a teacher, a master to help me rebuild" will come back in different ways, not necessarily exactly the same way. But it will keep coming back in Różewicz’s poetry for years. He is looking for a non-existent basis, but also this search constantly drives him to recent years.

In the 50’s and 60’s he was often called a "nihilist". I will return to the problem of nihilism in a moment, because it is, one could say, an invective, but not necessarily. It is a very interesting term that he has faced himself and, in fact, that he has confessed to. The fact that Różewicz constantly returns to the same, and on the other hand, aesthetically is constantly ahead of his time meant that he did not live to see him. Although, as I say, I’d like to make a correction right away. He did not get his criticism. He had several of them. I say a few, not a few, because initially they were all male. But everyone had betrayed him at some stage, abandoned him. Probably the longest, in a sense until the end, maybe with a moment of shutdown, was Kazimierz Wyka. Where did it come from? Why so?

Różewicz started out as an avant-garde poet. He got in touch quite early with Julian Przyboś, who was in the interwar period the most important Polish avant-garde poet, descended from the most important Polish avant-garde group, the Krakow Avant-garde. Julian Przyboś sensed the enormous potential of Tadeusz Różewicz and, one could say, introduced him to the literary market, testified, guaranteed that a poet, a poet with a capital "P" appeared on this poetry market. The huge role of “Anxiety" was also noticed by other critics and very quickly the critics came to the conclusion that it is an absolutely groundbreaking volume, that it is a foundation volume for Polish, new, post-war literature.

What did Różewicz suggest to this literature? Why is it a revolutionary volume? Well, Różewicz did not look for experimental solutions. He didn't want to make some kind of revolutionary change in poetry. He is not an experimental poet. But somehow it turned out that this experiment, despite the fact that he did not want to, was completed. The experiment is quite simple. Namely, on the complete stripper of poetry. It can be said that
at the same time as the famous German philosopher of Jewish origin Theodor Adorno came to the conclusion that it was impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno used an additional term that such poetry would be a “garbage dump”. Tadeusz Różewicz will also reach a garbage dump and the concept of culture as a garbage dump, but it will be in a moment. For now, he talks about it and writes in such a way as to confirm this thesis that it is impossible to write like this, especially poetry, as it has been written so far. Why am I speaking especially poetry? Because poetry was treated, even in a sense by the avant-garde, as a speech that was perhaps no longer festive, so that it would correspond to modernism. The avant-garde says that it is special speech, special speech. Tadeusz Różewicz does everything to eliminate this uniqueness, eliminate it and destroy it. Blurs the boundaries. Firstly, it blurs the boundaries between poetry, prose and drama, which Przyboś did not like very much, because Przyboś was the guardian of these borders. Secondly and most importantly, it blurs the boundaries between the ceremonial speech of poetry and ordinary speech, everyday speech. There are no metaphors in these poems. Well, we won't find it wrong. Of course we will, but these are completely different metaphors, operating on a completely different principle. It's not about linguistic originality. In this well-known group, Cracow Avant-garde, there was also another poet, Tadeusz Peiper, who said that a metaphor is the communication of words that are to come from maximally different semantic levels. Nobody in their right mind will put these words side by side. This is a completely different understanding of poetry from that represented by Różewicz. The words that he puts together are not to be surprised. But that is not enough. This poetry is basically supposed to pretend it's not poetry. Różewicz does not want to be described as an avant-garde poet. This revolution has happened, he thinks, in a way, somewhat obvious, because we return to Adorno, it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz as it was written before the Holocaust. But, he does not admit to being an avant-gardist mainly because he thinks that the avant-garde, we come back to Peiper again, this is literature, this is art for the twelve, and therefore art for the chosen, elitist art.

He is not an elitist. He writes about things which, in his opinion, are obvious, in obvious language and he wants them to reach everyone. But here is the paradox of the avant-garde. All avant-gardists, all avant-garde artists thought that they speak a language, no matter what artistic language, but they speak the language of people and talk to people.
And they were understood only by the brightest minds of that time, who still had basic knowledge of aesthetics and art. Well, I have an impression, although critics and researchers do not agree that Tadeusz Różewicz is such an artist not by choice, but also an avant-garde artist, perhaps even more than those by choice.

Let’s go back to his biography. The volume “Anxiety” was published in 1947, it caused a huge unrest in literary life. Różewicz was noticed, as I said, that is an understatement. But soon we have the famous Szczecin Congress, the proclaimed socialist realism, and poets, writers and artists must define themselves in the face of this new state of affairs. What does Różewicz do. Różewicz does his job, Różewicz constantly writes about the war trauma, about the cultural crisis that has been defined by this trauma. It would seem nothing like that, but of course the matter was very serious, because socialist realism is proclaimed optimism, it is a new power, a new life, a happily socialist life. Tadeusz Różewicz was never a happy poet and he did so. He wanted to believe that this system could be a teacher and master for a while. He published several volumes until ’55, in which we can find poems in which he orders himself to believe in this system. These are not confessional poems, but they are poems that could be said to somehow collaborate with this system.

He has failed well, and they are not very good poems. However, Andrzej Skrendo, probably the most important Polish researcher associated with Różewicz, says that he was not ashamed of these poems, that he reprinted them. And this is what distinguishes him from other poets who were somehow seduced by this system. He was not seduced. He was not a prominent of this system, he did not receive any sinexecutions, and even, which may seem strange, he did not join the party. Virtually everyone was in the party. And he emigrated, internal and external. He withdrew completely from his literary life and went to Gliwice in Upper Silesia. In ’49 he left, lived there until ’68, from where he came to Wroclaw. It was a very difficult time in his life, a very poor time in his life, but he wrote a lot and he wrote it. The end of the 50's and the whole 60's is a boom, both poetic and dramatic. But as I said, Różewicz can be said, if you treat it very "coarsely", so to speak, he is the author of one topic, he is the author of a cultural crisis. So in these years, he also explores the problem and sees its successive versions, identity, religious, aesthetic, ethical. We have such a famous drama. Perhaps not one of the most important, but one that would
be a good illustration of this identity drama, "He Left Home." Man loses identity. He comes home not knowing who he is. His wife tries to teach him, tries to remind him. But what does it mean? He tries to throw him into ruts that are to help him find himself in life, but in fact that are to submit him to social rules, uniforming rules.

Several themes appear, very clear at the time, which Różewicz is pursuing. Anonymous subject. Well, the one who left the house is also anonymous in a way, but reality does not want to let him be anonymous. Anonymous does not understand Różewicz as an apotheosis of an ordinary, gray man, because of course this is an important topic in socialist realist literature. We are ordinary, gray people, we are equal, we all pursue common goals. In Różewicz's work, anonymity comes through a drama, because being anonymous means being nobody, that is being eaten by the social, destructive reality. And a similar in some sense, but even more dramatic topic - nothing. I would say nothing, but he should not be confused with Nietzsche, because he is probably not Nietzsche. Although, not necessarily, I'm sorry. "Nothing" is not, as Różewicz says, an ordinary emptiness, because an ordinary emptiness would only be a lack. Of course, missing always demands to be filled. But Różewicz's "nothing" is an aggressive space, an active, aggressive space and a space that tends to escalate. It expands, it absorbs, it absorbs people, it absorbs values. It's such a yawning void. It all revolves somewhere around lack. From the very beginning, this topic is the leading topic. He accepts this lack, he takes different formulas. It was finally called, as I said earlier, Różewicz was called a nihilist. Of course, thinking about this category as pejoratively as possible. And Różewicz is a nihilist. Only he is the Nietzschean nihilist.

There is a famous scene from “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, when a young man bursts into the market square and shouts, dramatically shouting "God is gone, God is dead". Różewicz is such a person. For this young man, as well as for Różewicz, it was not, at least not primarily for Nietzsche, a formula that would liberate us from doing anything, including doing evil. If someone referred to Nietzsche and the death of God, doing evil, he used him for his purposes. Różewicz is such a nihilist. And I would also say Adorno. For Adorno, who I have not mentioned here so far, and I should, for Adorno, nihilism was the awareness of losing the metaphysical basis of reality, but persisting in this reality despite the feeling of this lack. Różewicz is someone exactly, exactly like that. Adorno's challenge,
to create poetry after Oświęcim was the challenge Różewicz faced. But to create poetry after Auschwitz does not mean to forget. So, all the shortcomings I am talking about, these anonyms, this issue is nothing but an attempt to create poetry after Auschwitz.

After the problem of nothing, anonymity appears, it would seem that the topic is completely extreme, namely the dump, this can also be said of the Adorno dump. Why do I say seemingly opposite? Well, because the garbage can is all, it is excess, while nothing is missing. But for Różewicz the garbage can is as redundant as it is underflow. The famous drama, the very good drama “The Old Woman Hanging Out” from 1969, was an aesthetic breakthrough in Polish theater, because the whole stage was one huge garbage can. It is a drama that today, actually earlier, but after 1989, has been treated as prophetic in a sense, because this garbage can has been shown since then as a post-consumer garbage bin, the garbage of our culture. Meanwhile, this is not a rubbish bin in '69. In '69, if you can talk about a cultural rubbish bin, it is rather a garbage can for sale values, I don't know what, but not a material garbage. Matter is just an effect of, well, no value.

Apart from the problem of lack, the main point of which is that Różewicz's "nothing", in the 1960s there is also the problem of excess in this poetry and in Różewicz's drama. The famous, I would say famous, topic of the garbage can. Perhaps it was best and most intensely realized in the 1969 drama “The Old Woman Huts Out”. This drama was considered prophetic, because the dump that constitutes the scene of this drama may be associated today with a post-consumer dump. Thus, Różewicz would be a prophet of post-consumption. But of course this is not the case of Poland, 1969. For Różewicz, culture as a rubbish dump is also an effect, it is also a case of the culture of lack. Because the fact that we live, we lived as Poles in such a polluted space was the result of this and not another historical moment. Because Różewicz does not dissociate himself from it, minimally, in this drama he is quite clearly politicizing. The last scene is a scene in which a young man throws a piece of paper, a young man who is a child a flower, a piece of paper in this garbage dump and dies. So, a clear allusion to the year '68 and May '68. But I want to say that this is not a post-consumer rubbish dump, it is a rubbish dump of values, it is a dump that is also the result of a lack of orientation, a lack of a signpost, a lack of ethics.
The 1970s and 1980s were difficult years in Różewicz’s work. He writes little then, no more plays, not much poetry. And the 1980s is the height of the crisis. There are hardly any poetry volumes, nor are there any dramas. Różewicz is silent.

I would like to mention that we can also read what happened in the 1960s from an avant-garde perspective. Now clearly neo-avant-garde. And by the way, I would like to say a little about the structure of this poetry, about what links it with the neo-avant-garde. Namely, Różewicz is a non-author, a fragment’s author, a recycling author. I have just mentioned the rubbish dump and you could say that he himself is an author who uses garbage and creates from already processed elements. This binds him most closely with neo-avant-garde artists. Not only is it handling the fragment, not just recycling. For him, the text is not a work. For him, the text is “work in progress”. Well, recycling helps to recycle, recycling blurs the boundaries between texts, between genres, between types, between texts. To make it even more interesting, there are dramas at that time in which we have a monologue, stage directions and a commentary to the drama over dialogue. So, what is marginal takes over the place of the center, the center disappears. Natural increase is actually a commentary on drama, a drama theory, not a drama. Różewicz is well versed in what is happening in contemporary art and many of these elements, well, for example, the neutralization of a work, an artistic work to say what is marginal around him, is close to him. This concept of art is close to him. However, we must remember again, this is not art for the sake of art, it is not aesthetics above reality and aesthetics above ethics. He uses these aesthetic formulas to say strong, powerful things about the world. Mainly what we have just said, the world is on the edge, getting closer to the edge.

I go back to the 80’s. It would seem that Różewicz’s silence at that time is something strange because the 1980s was a Polish national awakening, a time of solidarity. So also the time when they come out of the underground and say what those who, until now, seem to be able to seem, could not talk and think aloud, think. We said Różewicz is a poet of ethics, not aesthetics. So it’s a good time for him to speak up and he is silent. This silence was read, like his speech in the 1950s, as opportunistic. Even Zbigniew Herbert then disdained him from veneration and faith. However, it was recognized that he is the poet of the former system, since he cannot speak in this new reality. And the thing is simple. Różewicz hates
opportunist, hates the herd instinct and hates politics in general. He watches those who re-dye, looks at the opportunists, and I would say a little contemptuously, he is silent.

It stops only after 1989, so when freedom comes, so to speak, real. When no political constraints play a role in the evaluation of literature. But then an amazing thing happens. Metaphorically, I would say, the bubble with poetry explodes. After 1989, Różewicz is almost exclusively a poet, but he publishes several extremely important volumes. What does he do? It goes back to the same, goes back to what it was. Only that we must remember that even when Różewicz returns, he never comes back the same way and he always sees more, there are three steps ahead of the rest. It is so after 1989 that the old masters, well he is already old, the old masters lock themselves in ‘ivory towers’. Like Miłosz, they look for second spaces. Like other poets, they repeat themselves. They are either escapist, nostalgic, or re-religious, that’s what actually happened to Herbert. And Różewicz maintains a very, strong, very sharp contact with reality. He sees what is happening and reacts to this reality very clearly. But I said a moment ago that he does what he did before, that in a way it also repeats itself. Why. Because what he sees around him is another phase of the cultural crisis. This time it is post-consumerist. He suffers because of this as much as he suffered before, and he expresses it in poems, poems that open up to this element that they criticize themselves. So, Różewicz in a sense intercepts and reproduces mass media, journalistic and pop-political gibberish.

Różewicz’s late work, the poetry published after 1989, is poetry for critics, on the one hand phenomenal, because here the poet was reborn, and on the other hand difficult and increasingly difficult. The two most difficult volumes, published during Różewicz’s lifetime, “Buy a Pig in a Poke” and “This and That”, are probably the most difficult. Because it is they who are steeped in this pop-culture newspaper. As in “Valentine’s Day”, Różewicz makes his poem available to this stream, to this mass media gibberish. But, this is also the time when, so oxymoronically, “his deaths are nourished”. I mentioned the deficiencies, I mentioned the problem of nothing. I haven't talked about death, but it’s deadly poetry. It is a poetry in which death appropriates more and more territories. But Różewicz writes about death completely differently from other poets, including poets of his generation, but also younger ones. The way he wrote about death was not understood. At first, of course, yes, because they were “broken people’s wagons” like in “Survivor”. We
know where they came from, they are the result of the war. But time passed, others passed, did not pass it. And maybe there weren't any more “broken people's wagons”, death was becoming more abstract, but perhaps more overwhelming. Over time, two more deaths appear, besides human ones. The death of God and the death of poetry. This death of God, we talked about Nietzsche, is on the one hand so Christian, but not entirely, because Różewicz, its subject says, "I live in a world in which God died". A Christian would not say so, and then he says more and more often, from whom God has departed, leaving only traces.

But these traces are getting lost, we won't go too far after these traces. And here, of course, the echoes of the entire Christian philosophy are very clear. This death of God is in some measure the death of Christ. Here we also find echoes of the apophatic philosophy. And critics argue, Różewicz an atheist, maybe not critics, but such texts were written. Is Różewicz an atheist or is he rather a believer? And this is not Różewicz's problem. That's not how you put it. And another death, the death of poetry. Also a complete misunderstanding. Perhaps it caused even greater misunderstanding than the death of God, which was known to read, there were certain tools for this. The death of poetry. Very important critics accuse Różewicz of, in fact, madness, and certainly inconsistency. Well, like that, you say poetry is dead and you write poems and you write a lot of them. Is it dead or not?

Today we have more tools to look at these deaths, including the death of poetry. And for me it was shocking when I noticed that in order to understand what Różewicz meant, we must be aware of actually contemporary philosophy. The one under the sign of Gianni Vattimo or Arthur Danto. Because it has only been for some time, relatively recently, but it actually started in the neo-avant-garde, that is, in the times when Różewicz had his finger on the pulse very clearly, when it comes to aesthetics. The art is dead. But what does it mean she died? Well, it died in the version that was in force so far. All its legitimations, so to speak, have become illegal. Art is no longer art with a capital “S”. Różewicz says this is how I write poems, but there is a difference between poetry and poems. Poetry is dead, and I'm just writing poems. Well, he is aware that he lives in a post-poetic, post-artistic era where everything has been equated with everything and you can write poems as well as not writing them or doing anything else. So poetry has been deprived, art has been deprived of
its importance, its enormous role in culture. But it seems easy today. However, in the years '60, '70, no. So no one understood him.

I go back to those late poems. Criticism argues about them. He quarrels in the sense that, well, can this poetry be called good poetry? If it is banal poetry. Yes, poetry that mocks this banality, which, well, approaches him sarcastically. It goes without saying, but it does open up to this cliché. Well, very interesting concepts have appeared recently, concepts in the post-secular spirit. So again something that could not have been predicted in advance. And Różewicz has been such a post-secular one since the late 1960s. Well, it would look like this, such a defense of Różewicz, a defense of his latest poetry, that Różewicz makes an offering. Różewicz makes a sacrifice of his own poetry, of himself as a poet, of his creative possibilities. Emptying, it would be Christian gnosis. And what would it follow? I have the impression that it is impossible to go further. That is, he will not discover for us new possibilities of reading our world, his world, the world from the last years of his life. In the sense of new, that when we look at these poems in twenty years, thirty years from now, we will notice that I would be wrong, that there was something transparent, something prophetic in them, and we do not see it today. He is already ninety years old and ninety-three when he dies. He will not notice the subversive possibilities of popular culture that have been noticed, but he is doing this offering, self-sacrificing, and it is an extremely consistent gesture. Because he did nothing else in his whole life as he called for value.

He is not a postmodernist. It's also a problem that has kept critics and researchers awake at night for a while. I am not saying this authoritatively, because there will be critics and researchers who will say he was a postmodernist. Różewicz says, as a postmodernist like you, I am in times, always a bit of recycling, I was also in times of anxiety. And he is right because he saw a breakup from the beginning. From the beginning, he applied the poetics of the fragment, but philosophically and ideologically he was on the side of modernism. He suffers from the loss of wholeness, he suffers from what happened to European culture. He would like to go back to the whole. Although there is no return to the whole thing. So he is a modernist. He is a modernist mentally, extremely aware of what was happening in culture after modernism. He uses it brilliantly.
Finally, a few more words about Różewicz’s translations into English. They are, and they are great. There is something to read, there is something to start with. We have two translators. If you wanted such an early Różewicz and an easier to adapt Różewicz, I would say to the older generations, such a more orthodox, not young Różewicz, not the one from recent years, this is the book Selected Poems, Tadeusz Różewicz, Selected Poems by Adam Czerniawski, an outstanding poet. But my second book is “Sobbing Superpower. Selected Poems” by Joanna Trzeciak. The book received three awards. It is unique in that we get the whole, not all of Różewicz, of course, but a viewer that gives us an overview of the entirety of Różewicz’s poetry for his last volumes. Apart from that, I propose a biography of Różewicz and some kind of footnotes. As you know, the English-speaking reader will get lost in many moments. It is not only about Polish reality, but also references to Polish literature and Polish culture. Joanna took the trouble to explain all these difficult moments. Besides, I learned from the translator that a few days ago she was preparing Różewicz’s issue of Polish Review, which is to be published soon and, as Joanna Trzeciak claims, will be great. Also all those who are interested, especially in Tadeusz Różewicz’s poetry, have a good time ahead of them.
Appendix. A short dictionary of some key concepts in Tadeusz Różewicz’s work

AVANT-GARDE – Różewicz’s work stems from the aesthetic concept of the avant-garde, breaking with established aesthetic rules and built on a utopian idea of unity between art and social world. Różewicz, who always had more affinity with artists than with literary circles, was a precursor of the neo-avant-garde in Polish poetry and drama. On the one hand, he recognized the material nature of literary art, and on the other – the primacy of process over actuality. For example, his “Birth Rate” is a concept of an unwritten (writing itself) drama, and “The Scattered Card Index” is an ‘impossible drama’, endless, a drama in progress. Although Różewicz did not consider himself an avant-garde writer – mainly because he didn’t agree with the avant-garde elitism and cult of novelty – he remains one of the key innovators in Polish literature of the 20th century.

“REISTIC” POETRY – Early poetry of Różewicz is an attempt to implement a utopian project of a transparent language, not really naming objects but being a part of their world – a project of a language-object, which belongs more to the order of objects and events than signs. It’s one of the effects of the “poetic revolution” of Różewicz, answering the challenge he set for himself, namely “creating poetry after Auschwitz”, i.e. anew, outside the established system of codes and conventions, maximally close (“true”) to the devalued world. The language of that poetry does not want to differ from ‘normal’ language, it is the farthest from any poetic sacrum.

RÖZEWICZ’S POEM – A type of emotive poem, which, due to its specificity, i.e. verse fragmentation based on short, ‘screaming’ lines, has been separated from the so-called system IV (an avant-garde poem that goes beyond syllabism, syllabotonism and tonism, for which the intonational independence of individual lines is typical). The precursor of this type of poem is Guillaume Apollinaire, and in Poland: Jan Kasprowicz, Leopold Staff and Józef Czechowicz. Różewicz’s verse is not based on compliance with the intonation set (a group of syllables subordinated to one stress), but words are grouped around a common logical stress. Różewicz's poem, intonationally close to the prosody of colloquial speech, revolutionized Polish post-war poetry.

MEAT – Różewicz's early work is full of images of corporeality freed from the boundaries of the body. The body here is either incomplete or over-complete, always animal and material, unpredictable. A sign of such disturbing corporeality may be the man-larva from the poem published in “The Third Face” and the image of Gioconda with lips (or rather a mouth) resembling a “monstrous cadaver” (“At the Same Time” from the volume “Nothing in Prospero’s Cloak”). This ‘alien’, abject corporeality has a lot in common with the ‘meaty’, profane paintings of Francis Bacon – Różewicz addressed his work in the poem “Francis Bacon or Diego Velázquez in a Dentist’s Chair” (from “Always a Fragment: Recycling”). Also, language in Różewicz's work is subject to the same laws of uncontrolled, hysterical growth.

NIHILISM, NOTHING – Nihilism, one of the most frequent accusations against Różewicz’s work, supposedly indicating his incurable pessimism, his inability to free himself from the war trauma, and his cultural catastrophism, can also be considered a neutral descriptive category. ‘Positively’ understood nihilism, forming a basis for an attitude of ethical rigorism, would find its source in Nietzsche’s writings, and one of its important
philosophical interpreters would be Theodor Adorno. This is how Różewicz understands it, ‘admitting’ to being a nihilist whose faith in the so-called humanity has strongly weakened, but who “despite everything, works and is an active member of the society” (K. Braun, T. Różewicz, “Języki teatru” [Languages of the Theatre], Wrocław 1989, p. 111). Therefore, from the first to the last book, Różewicz is a nihilist, convinced of the irreversible and progressing decline of culture; his ‘nothing’ (which is often an independent theme, as in “Nothing in Prospero's Cloak”) becomes more and more material, aggressive and greedy.

ANONYM – Różewicz’s man without qualities is a product of “our little stabilization” (“Witnesses or Our Little Stabilization”), mass culture and the consumer society of the Gomulka era. He is not a ‘simple man’, the bedrock of social order, but a “sewer pipe” (“New Man” from “Conversation with the Prince”), a part of a thoughtless and greedy, self-reproducing mass. One of his incarnations is the (anti) hero of the ‘so-called comedy’ “He Left Home”. After he slipped on a banana peel and hit his head on a monument, nothing can restore his memory and bring him back to his family and professional life – all those ‘individual’ forms are bland, banal, the same, i.e. none. Anonym is the proper name of a man of that time.

GARBAGE DUMP – Różewicz’s garbage dump has different ‘faces’. Initially, the subject of his poems and the protagonist of his dramas lives in a space which could be called a post-war cultural garbage dump, and so using it seems fair (as in the play by Albert Burrie, who created his first sculptures in a POW camp). In time – with the advent of mass culture, and then popular culture – the image of culture as a garbage dump illustrates the progress of the “cultural industry” (Adorno). Much earlier, before the problems related to post-consumerism were discussed in the West, Różewicz drew attention to this process, but in its ‘ascending’ version (Poland of the 1960s), what ended up in the garbage dump were not so much things, but values underlying the Western culture. Later, he observed the transformation of this culture as more and more shallow and greedy. The drama “The Old Woman Broods” (1968) is one of the first images of this kind in the European literature.

DEATH OF POETRY – An idea, appearing in Różewicz’s work from the beginning of the 1960s and related to his ethical orientation, of invalidating poetry (and art in general), which loses its aesthetic and metaphysical prerogatives, gradually taking on the dimension of self-negation – a poem communicating that it is not a poem or poetry after the death of poetry. This idea goes through various phases: from utopian-philosophical (close to Adorno’s understanding), through technological, related to the kitsch of mass culture and the dominance of mass media, to post-secular-hauntological, when the killing of a poem reproducing the gibberish of pop culture can be treated as a process of ‘getting over’ metaphysics. As a ‘bard’ of the death of art, Różewicz was ahead of the later concepts of art theorists, including Vattim’s.

ALWAYS A FRAGMENT: RECYCLING – The title of a volume from 1989 perfectly reflects the creative method of Różewicz, whose whole ‘work’ is a ‘work in progress’, constantly transformed, moved and changed. The point is not only that the poet prioritized the process over the finished result – which, like most neo-avant-garde artists, he did not accept – but also that the “rule of a fragment” is the basis for the construction of his texts.
(often ostentatiously collage or bricolage like, or – like “The Scattered Card Index” – open), because it best adheres to a degraded, fragmented and devalued world.

**TRANSGRESSIVENESS** – One of the most important features of Różewicz’s work, often emphasized by researchers, is the ability to cross – problematize, question, but not abolish – the oppositions on which the European culture (modernity) is based. These include, among others, complex relationships between ethics and aesthetics, aesthetics and anti-aesthetics, realism and metaphysics, faith and atheism, construction and destruction, optimism and pessimism. Różewicz, in a way appropriate to transgressions (the category was the first time used as the key to Różewicz’s work by Andrzej Skrendo), by questioning the accepted boundaries between those categories, subjects culture to a painful analysis, and in his diagnoses often anticipates changes and proclaims views unacceptable to his contemporaries.