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Lumpenbroletariat among the Polystyrene Butterflies: On Robert Rybicki's *The Squatters' Gift* (*Dar Meneli*) as Poetic Travelogue

ABSTRACT

Dar Meneli (*The Squatters' Gift*)—a collection by Polish poet Robert Rybicki, a self-proclaimed *happener*—is a poetic travelogue through numerous languages and locales, both real and imaginary. His peripatetic poems pass through—and sometimes squat in—numerous, often industrial cities, including Gliwice, Wrocław, Poznań, Prague, Vienna, Bratislava, Rybnik, Kraków, Warsaw, Toruń, Gdańsk, Świnoujście, and Lublin. Written over a five-year period in which Rybicki was intermittently squatting or engaging in collective action, *Dar Meneli* excavates syllable and song, mind and muck, to invent a transnational dialogic poetry pointedly unapologetic, where Greek mythology intersects with 1980s Polish punk music, poetic string theory, time travel, and psychedelic dumpster diving. An inheritor of 20th-century European avant-garde poets Miron Białoszewski, Paul Celan, and Tristan Tzara, Rybicki works at the border between performance and (language) disruptions. Understandably, his poetry presents an array of translational challenges, ranging from acrobatic multilingualism to implosive neologisms. Drawing from my own experiences as a translator of Robert Rybicki's work, this article has three aims: first, to outline Joan Retallack's concept of "the poethical wager"; secondly, to consider how Retallack's "poethics" can open a pathway to transposing poetics to a translation practice (and to translating Rybicki in particular), a practice modeled after what Jerzy Jarniewicz has termed the "legislator-translator"; and thirdly, to demonstrate that what Sherry Simon terms the "translation zone" is a distinguishing feature of Rybicki's multilingual poetics in his collection *The Squatters' Gift*.

Keywords: Polish poetry, translation studies, travelogue, contemporary poetry.



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RADICALLY ALTERED GEOMETRIES OF ATTENTION

In her book *The Poethical Wager*, Joan Retallack asks: "What is implied about the forms with which we attempt to make meaning of our experience?" (82). Drawing from my own experiences (and implications) as a translator of Robert Rybicki's work, this article has three aims: first, to outline the concept of "the poethical wager"; secondly, to consider how Retallack's "poethics" can open a pathway to transposing poetics to a translation practice, and to translating Rybicki in particular; and thirdly, to demonstrate that what Sherry Simon terms the "translation zone" is a distinguishing feature of Rybicki's multilingual poetics in his collection *The Squatters' Gift*.

Across a decades-long career, Joan Retallack has found both creative fuel and renewal in what she describes as the "swerves [of life]—sometimes gentle, often violent out-of-the-blue motions that cut obliquely across material and conceptual logics" (1). These "swerves" constitute part of a broader theoretical framework that Retallack has termed "the poethical wager." This concept grows out of John Cage's pioneering work on aleatoric operations—the myriad ways in which chance and unpredictability can result in innovative creative output—and is based playfully on the hedging of Pascal's famous wager: the existence of God and an afterlife is here substituted with the existence of readers, publishers, and a connection with other people. The term "poethics," which combines *poetics* with *ethics* and *ethos*, is understood here as a moral imperative. After all, "[e]very poetics is a consequential form of life. Any making of forms out of language (*poesis*) is a practice with a discernible character (*ethos*) [and] values are an inextricable dimension of all human behavior" (Retallack 11). While Retallack's poethics looks to embrace unpredictability as a matter of principle, she also cautions against systemic rigidity: "Ethical analysis that foregrounds isolated acts of individual will always fail when real life floods in and muddies the logic" (24). For Retallack, innovators such as John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Galileo, Benoit Mandelbrot, or Gertrude Stein are enlivening not only because of their desire to push their respective fields forward, but precisely because they offer "new ways of conceiving the relation between the discipline and the extradisciplinary experience, new recognitions of the degree to which these projects are complicated by their positions in multiple intersecting and overlapping sociopolitical and cultural constellations" (27). As will be discussed later, these "intersecting and overlapping sociopolitical and cultural constellations" are similarly applicable to Sherry Simon's "translation zone" and Robert Rybicki's poetics.

Embracing the uncertainty of life, the risks and lurches of new experiences or forms of expression, can—as Retallack notes—provoke “an unsettling transfiguration of once-familiar terrain [which tends] to produce disorientation, even estrangement, by radically altering geometries of attention” (1). However, engaging in the act or process of translation can also be seen as a “geometr[y] of attention,” and, in the case of Robert Rybicki’s poetry, an attention “radically alter[ed].” Thus, Retallack’s “poethics” offered me a helpful way of embracing the difficulty inherent in Rybicki’s poetry.

When John O’Brien, the founder of Dalkey Archive Press, approached me with a keen interest in publishing a contemporary Polish writer in my translation, I did not have a ready project, nor an immediate book or writer in mind. It was only after a series of conversations that we agreed that translating Rybicki’s *Dar Meneli* was a fitting project for the press’s catalogue. Those conversations highlighted various aspects of Rybicki’s poetics: his unwillingness to adhere to any particular poetic style, mode, or form; his penchant for flouting literary politeness; and his restless multilingual desire to acrobatically shift registers or languages, sometimes operating between half a dozen languages within a few lines. My unfamiliarity with more than half the languages that Rybicki can casually deploy, along with the dizzying formal variety, left me far outside my comfort zone. Yet Retallack’s poethics provided me equal parts insight and encouragement to embrace translating Rybicki: “Complexity—the network of indeterminacies it spawns—is the condition of our freedom. That freedom, insofar as it is exercised as imaginative agency, thrives in long-term projects . . . that reconfigure patterns of thought and imagination” (82). In other words, from the point of view of translation, the fact that Rybicki’s work is highly resistant to a prescriptive methodology can be a liberating force for unpredictable creativity rather than an obstacle. The knowledge that the translator is certain to encounter what Retallack would call “many swerves” which must be navigated “with as much responsible awareness as possible” (3) meant approaching each poem in Rybicki’s book with openness, relinquishing preconceived ideas about how a poem or translation might operate. The translator—like any reader of Rybicki—unavoidably confronts the unknown, be it through different languages, registers, or modes of discourse, such as deformed syntax or flurries of neologisms, as well as the realities of the publishing market. The “poetical wager” which I had to make as a translator of Rybicki was that—given the myriad difficulties of the numerous languages, some of which are unknown to me and far outside my previous translational experiences, plus the forms he deploys—I could even arrive at creating effective (primarily) English-language versions of his poetry, which could then find support in the Anglophone publishing sphere.

A JOURNEY AROUND THE STATION(S)

Born in Rybnik, Poland in 1976, Robert “Ryba” Rybicki is a one-person cosmopolis and, over the past two decades, his status within his native Poland has grown to near-mythic proportions. A self-described “happener,” Rybicki creates poetic events as he works at the intersection of performance and disruption, theatricality and confrontation, a practice that harks back to figures such as Rolf Brinkmann, Tadeusz Kantor, and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (“Witkacy”). The prolific Rybicki’s *Dar Meneli* (*The Squatters’ Gift*) can be described as a poetic travelogue through numerous languages and locales, both real and imaginary. Like poetic pioneers Miron Białoszewski, Paul Celan, and Tristan Tzara, Rybicki excavates syllable and song, mind and muck, to invent a transnational poetry that is attuned to the history of the European avant-garde poetries of the previous century and the affects of radical deformations of syntax. In fact, Rybicki explicitly acknowledges that his work is indebted to—or, in fact, extends—these traditions, as witness his well-known 2016 essay “Awangarda Poetycka w Polsce 100 lat po dadzie Tzary” (“The Poetic Avant-garde in Poland 100 Years after Tzara’s Dada”) and the title of one of the sections in *The Squatters’ Gift*, i.e. “Immediate Opening: A New Tristan Tzara.”

Like Rybicki himself, the poems in *The Squatters’ Gift* are peripatetic, passing through—and sometimes conscientiously squatting in—cities such as Gliwice, Wrocław, Poznań, Prague, Vienna, Bratislava, Rybnik, Kraków, Warsaw, Toruń, Gdańsk, Świnoujście, and Lublin. Just as the speakers shift locales, so do the poems’ subjects and forms, and while Rybicki writes primarily in Polish (albeit a Polish buttressed with many neologisms or idiosyncratic syntax), throughout the book he freely uses Czech, English, French, German, Spanish, Slovak, and Silesian. Moreover, it is worth considering the unique origins of Rybicki’s volume. The first edition of his book was not, as one might expect, published in Poland, but in the Czech Republic—as the dually-titled and bilingual *Dar lůzrů/ Dar Meneli*—by Protimluv, an Ostrava-based publishing house, in 2014. The first (primarily) Polish edition of the book did not appear until 2017, although it was expanded in comparison to the original Czech edition. In other words, from its very beginning, Rybicki’s book was migratory, not limited to any clearly delineated national or linguistic borders. Indeed, his poetics can be characterized as what Sherry Simon has termed a “translation zone,” with “spaces defined by a relentless to-and-fro of language, by an acute consciousness of translational relationships, and by the kinds of polymorphous translation practices characteristic of multilingual milieus” (“The Translation Zones” 181). Thus, situating itself as bilingual (and proliferating linguistically from there), the book begins as dialogic and is

informed by a volley of cities and languages, their “relentless to-and-fro.” If, as Pennycook and Otsuji argue, “[t]he city is always a site of struggle” (100–01), for Rybicki that struggle can be seen in his various languages—even including graffiti or the nonhuman, for example, in “POETRY LESSON (the singing of Czech birds)”—mirroring the speaker’s migration, socioeconomic precarity, and anarcho-activism.

The spatially dispersed, flowing, or layered lines of “The shots will disappear,” the poem which opens *The Squatters’ Gift*, might bring to mind a sort of vagabond Jack Gladney from Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, wandering the supermarket aisles in a consumerist haze: “The supermarket / melts / like a chocolate bar: / a dendrite stack” (3).¹ Where DeLillo presents Gladney seeking refuge in the comforts of ritualized shopping as a kind of mediation on late capitalism, Rybicki expands the vector into the multilingual and multidimensional, Greek mythology intersecting with 1980s Polish punk music, poetic string theory, time travel, wanderlust, and psychedelic dumpster diving. After all, “[p]oetry’s / the mathematics of / an inaccessible / dimension” (11). This poem presented me with the first foray into the unpredictable, confronting me with a series of decisions about how to translate segments in a language other than Polish, or whether to translate them at all. In this case, Rybicki deploys a series of parenthetical Czech words—*namorzniak*, *chorobopis*, and *wzducholot*—which, given the geographic proximity, Polish readers might track as both somewhat familiar and peculiar. Considering translation as “a palette of mobile practices of translingual inscription” (Malinowski 58), I chose to render those parts in Spanish—*un marinero*, *historial médico*, and *el dirigible*—aiming for how American English-speakers often brush up against Spanish in their day-to-day lives.

Privileging unpredictability, especially as it pertains to creativity and translation, helps one, as Retallack puts it, to “operate in an atmosphere of uncertainty, that gives us the courage to forge on, to launch our hopes into the unknown—the future—by engaging positively with otherness and unintelligibility” (22). The poet and critic Adam Wiedemann suggests that it is as if Rybicki began each poem “at the zero point of poetry” and continued “without respecting sacred literary rules and especially ‘culture’” (qtd. in Woźniak, translation mine). This “zero point” informed my reading and translation of Rybicki, allowing me to experience the myriad forms and languages without trying for systematic, categorical translation solutions. (In other words, just because non-Polish segments in one poem might be translated into Spanish, as was the case in “The shots will disappear,” I did

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Robert Rybicki will be from *The Squatters’ Gift*.

not feel this was a rule that needed to be applied throughout.) Not unlike American poet Michael Palmer—who regularly deploys paradoxes and oxymorons in his poetry—Rybicki is animated by contradictory impulses, continuously toggling between the epistemic and the somatic: “Thought clamps the body / like a barrel rim” (9). These competing energies allow Rybicki at one moment to offer a poem that stylistically recalls Czesław Miłosz—in “Footnote to Karasek,”² two friends reminisce over a cheap bottle of wine and the speaker wistfully concludes that “the heavens aren’t silent / if you have them in you” (70)—only to shift in the next poem, “illuminobjects,” to a parody of Frank O’Hara’s penchant for enthusiastic proclamations:

let every word be a revelation!
let it be beautiful like shitting under a tree,
& fucking squatting down & not
on this disgusting can. Who
will forbid me, who will tell me what to do? (71)

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Rybicki’s speaker embodies the sort of iconoclasm reminiscent of Peter Handke’s play *Offending the Audience*.³ Criticizing the esteemed Polish literary journal *Literatura na Świecie*—whose editors have been impacted by the New York School poets and have brought the likes of O’Hara, Ashbery, and Schuyler into Polish translation—Rybicki declares, “they think intensively about New Yorkers! / And I’m sitting who knows where? O’Hara’s shmara, / shmara & samara!” and “Get lost, Calvin Klein!” (71). The frustration or anger vented by Rybicki’s speaker raises “the question of the agency of poetry in the face of the economic crisis of the previous decade *expressis verbis* after his return from emigration”—querying what poetries get read, celebrated, or translated, and perhaps the inequalities inherent in such dynamics (Glosowitz 277, translation mine). Moreover, it speaks to a different kind of “relentless to-and-fro”: namely, the dominance of New York as a city in the social imaginary. After four decades, the impact of Ashbery and O’Hara’s on Polish poetry is still being felt today; perhaps even with the breadth of formal and geographical migration at play in Rybicki’s poetry, New York cannot be escaped and is somehow always a (perhaps unwelcome) resident in his translation zone.

² Krzysztof Karasek (b. 1937), Polish poet and public figure based in Warsaw.

³ Written by Austrian Nobel-Prize winning author Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience* (*Publikumsbeschimpfung* in German) is a 1966 play—sometimes called an “anti-play” or “non-play”—in which the primary aim is to implode the conventions of theatricality by eradicating the so-called *fourth wall* with a torrent of ironic and acerbic speech acts directed explicitly at the audience for the duration of the performance.

In many respects, the poem “APPLEMA” is typical of this volume, populated as it is with English, German, Spanish, and Silesian along with Rybicki’s idiosyncratic Polish. The title is a trimming of the word “apple man” (“jabłczarz” in Polish), which when abridged becomes a mysterious word that sounds like a cross between a hum and a curse, pushed out of pursed lips. The poem opens with bellowing bodily pains (“Heart rampage! / The sciatic nerve / like holy smoke!”) and then suddenly pivots to a multilingual, inter-species act of literary dialogue:

FOR
 a tausend years
 we’ll set up a journal
 CARRÁMBA
 and publish
 interviews with doggies & mousies
 en el lenguaje de perro
 y el lenguaje de ratón
 squeak squeak
 woof woof
 CARRÁMBA
 será la última palabra
 en el mundo
 muchas matas
 el lenguaje de plantas
 el lenguaje de bacterias
 BACTERIAN (49)

Rybicki takes as his starting point for the imagined literary journal a slightly misspelled interjection from Spanish (“¡Ay, caramba!”), a place where “doggies & mousies” can be interviewed, elevating the languages of plants or bacteria within a temporal frame of a millennium, the peculiarly emphatic “FOR/a tausend years.” Considering that controversial figures from Poland’s Communist regime (such as former Polish president Wojciech Jaruzelski and Czesław Kiszczak, the head of the secret police) appear in other parts of the volume, activities such as the imagined literary journal “CARRÁMBA”—like the migratory squatting—can be seen in the context of the samizdat, the underground, largely urban initiative opposing repressive political forces. Moreover, the visual layering of the poem provides a sense of architecture, as if glimpsing a segment of skyline; as Pennycook and Otsuji suggest, “layers are not about the mere overlapping of texts on flat surfaces; rather, they need to be seen in terms of sedimented activities and practices that are still in motion” (139). For Rybicki, such movement is tracked in language; in the envisioned poetic future, “we / shall visit each other in our homes / for which no one will want anything from us / we’ll happily prepare warm

meals" (49–50). The poem concludes with acts of generosity and empathy, providing both literal and metaphorical sustenance and shelter, but presumes throughout that the contours of such a place will be shaped by a continually multilingual volley. Such poetic practices can be informed by what Carol Gilligan describes as ethics of care: to quote from Retallack again, "[t]he same global and space information technologies that are disembarassing us of the illusion of other as absence are schooling us in multidirectional coincidence (a pattern, coincidentally, related to Carol Gilligan's web image of characteristic female thinking) as a connective principle at least as forceful as monodirectional (hierarchical) cause-effect" (114).

A similarly anti-neoliberal and anti-neocolonial imperative energizes the work of Korean-American poet and translator Don Mee Choi, who regards our languages as intertwined not only with our lives and struggles, but also with histories of imperialism, colonialism, militarism, and expanding economic ties (18–19), which adds a deeper temporal dimension to the translation zone. Choi's position proved a helpful lens for both understanding and translating Rybicki. During the five years of working on *The Squatters' Gift*, he was, in fact, deliberately squatting, conscientiously taking part in collective action. As a poetic translation zone, Rybicki's work is then, by its very nature, tendentious and nomadic. In a conversation with scholar Monika Glosowicz and poet Dawid Kujawa, published as "Rzygi Stardust" (the title alludes to David Bowie's famed gender-bending character, translated here into genre-bending and economic precarity, with "rzygi" as slang for "puke"), Rybicki declares: "Poetry needs to be taken out of school to become a forbidden fruit, and then it will taste different" (translation mine). In this context, his poetry can reflect how, as Simon argues, "both translation and hybridity are alternatives to ideas of assimilation (loss of identity) and multiculturalism (the multiplication of discreet and separate identities). Both translation and hybridity emphasize the disjunctive and provisional nature of affiliation, taking the form of interlingual or mixed expression" ("Hybridity and Translation" 51).

Such “mixed expression” is at its fullest in “HAPPYDADA,” a multilingual vortex, building off of Hugo Ball’s sound poetry and its incantatory childlike improvisation. Rather than leveraging an invented language like Ball, however, Rybicki mixes a plethora of languages even within a single line:

gdy anoda i katoda nic nam nie doda,
gdy nada się na nic nie nada
und null mit nuddeln in moon,
pagoda i dynamiczny skun,
skok in school, skeptic kung-fu in typhoon,
und simpsons on screen
w doktryn (42)

Or:

No-one knows how it grows,
frazofrenik z fraktalem frędzla fryzury Freuda,
ale fala z woala à la Aal im Allee (42)

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Loosely translated, this “phrasophrenic with Freud’s fringed hair” rides a wave (“fala”) of hybridity, practicing “kung-fu in [a] typhoon” even if, roughly translated, it amounts to “a whole lot of nothing on the moon.” The shifts between languages are so swift and numerous as to be acrobatic, with no particular language given primacy. After all, as the speaker states: “nomada gada dada” (42). For Polish speakers, “nomada gada dada” would be basically intelligible, roughly understood as “the nomad talkie dada.” For English speakers, the phrasing is still relatively traceable but could also bring to mind the hard rock band Iron Butterfly’s 1968 song, “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida.”

Since, as Malinowski argues, “translating is not just a textual/literary process between source and target, but an ethical and cultural one that draws upon the person of the translator, pushing them to find a third, separate space beyond the assumed binarisms of the field” (60), I had to consider what, if anything, could or should be translated in “HAPPY DADA.” As a result, the poem is the only one in the book that remains unchanged. Importantly, however, “HAPPY DADA” is placed in the center of the collection, akin to a town square: it is the poem that the reader works toward, and then springs out of, the most energetic demonstration of the translation zone characteristic of Rybicki’s poetics. If a key feature of a translation zone is what Simon describes as “a relentless to-and-fro of language,” for Rybicki that to-and-fro is fueled by multilingual sonic play, where the sound qualities of a word like “skok” (“jump” or “leap” in Polish) can alliteratively hop to the English word “school,” only to flip into “skeptic kung-fu.” Similarly, “und simpsons on screen / w doktryn” skips from German to English to Polish, offering the soft rhyme of “on screen” with the Polish “w doktryn” (“doctrines”). In “Rzygi Stardust,” Rybicki notes that, by using six different languages in “HAPPY DADA,” “I deprived myself of the dictates of my mother tongue, which is a liberation from my own culture, and in the poem ‘POETRY LESSON (the singing of Czech birds),’ . . . there is not a single human word in the course of the lyric.”

As Rybicki’s speakers migrate to various hybrid forms of language, locale, or subjectivity, the reader takes on that itinerary, navigating the poetic centrifugal force:

The Squatters’ Gift allows you to look at the fundamental contradiction driving Rybicki’s work: extreme individualism collides with social

empathy, radical skepticism and situational ethics with the community spirit and leftist sensitivity. Gorgias meets Christ, Socrates—Jacek Kuroń. Poems, whose arena is the poetic “I” . . . also become attempts to elevate linguistic foundations for a new interpersonal reality. Sophisticated poetic paradoxes are not stairs up to a literary Olympus, but in the opposite direction—because the direction towards clarity and purity turns out to be down. (Woźniak, translation mine)

The poetic paradoxes that Woźniak highlights are also visible in Rybicki's crossing from exteriority to interiority, both linguistically and formally, as he continually tests new poetic configurations. From the explosively open-field poetics in poems such as “The shots will disappear,” “Dunk sans bunk,” or the six-page long poem “I WOKE UP” that concludes the book, he offers the sharp contrast of extraordinarily compressed lyrical poems that prominently feature negated or double-negated, neologistic portmanteaux—sometimes a dozen or more in number—like in “PREPOEM ON GIGIPOESIE” or the opening section of the four-part “MAN, SPEECH & IMPOTENCE”:

Mothness. Unspokement. A block.
It's an unbreakon lan. Break

yoursell. Yell. Where's he
fromm. An unvile

tongue unobtained from the viscera,
ununfound, flashy, fleshy,
reckless in the extracts from its nature,
feckless in the descriptions of the blind,
though kind, inclined and refined;

in the prosody of perdition
in the music of martyrdom,

secretly give yourself
an answer. Without experti. (15–16)

The portmanteaux have the gravitational pull of black holes, causing the poem to sputter and stagger in the mouth and on the page, and then slingshot forward, to be truncated mid-flight. “Unspokement” acts as a neologistic oxymoron; “yoursell”—a transactional self that transforms, via implosion, into “Yell.” The poem then gains momentum with a string of rhymes and assonances: “flashy,” “fleshy,” “reckless” and “feckless,” along with “blind,” “kind,” “inclined,” and “refined.” If any insights are offered,

they remain secret ones that are abruptly trimmed (or perhaps sloughed off into a Latinate plural): “Without experti.” Such gestures might recall the work of Białoszewski or Celan, among others, since Rybicki’s poetics is fundamentally informed by an imperative to extend various forms of 20th-century avant-garde writing. As he explains in the aforementioned essay (“Awangarda Poetycka”), he sees the innovative and the avant-garde as

the liberation of the poem from the bindings of speech, from rigid formulas, canons, permanent inter-sensory relationships; it is dynamic in every part of itself, like the engine of a car. The avant-garde poem trembles and vibrates: it’s not only a creation, but creates a new mimesis, a new sensitivity to stimuli. The great advantage of the avant-garde lies in the fact that it broadens the spectrum of poetic experience. (translation mine)

That “new sensitivity to stimuli” or “spectrum of poetic experience” is broadened in numerous ways throughout his book, but in just the second section of “MAN, SPEECH & IMPOTENCE,” Rybicki demonstrates how quickly he changes forms:

Towers,
spires,
chimneys, sky
scrapers.

Concrete,
brick,
walls
of glass.

Ten-story
apartment buildings.

At the feet
& from up high. (16)

The distinctive linguistic compression from the first section of the poem, replete with neologisms, negative prefixes, and a propulsive rhythm, gives way to a profound minimalism enacted as urban architecture, a linguistic landscape made from the skyward structures of spires and chimneys, coupled with both a bird’s-eye view and ground-level perspective. Such idiosyncrasies of Rybicki’s poetic syntax—whether in the original Polish or in English (and other languages)—demonstrate, as Glosowitz argues, that “subjectivity itself is collective, not naively relational, not so much based on

an existentialistically-framed community of experience, but on the proximity of systemic conditions between different subjects" (275, translation mine).

As both speaker and reader move through the book, that movement and travel are mirrored in the content of the poems as well as in their grammar and syntax. "JOURNEY AROUND THE STATION" opens with:

A drop on the needle, but
something like the crack of a board against the cobbles &
the laughter of three girls
on a soundless walk as

vitrified snow &
lumpenbroletariat

among the polystyrene butterflies
& files of memory dumps system errors
& dream like dawn:

not only the stomach & liver
are hungry. The arms are hungry. (24)

Gone are the hyper-compressed neologisms, peculiar compound nouns, or poetic structures from "MAN, SPEECH & IMPO'TENCE." Instead, we navigate different irregular stanzaic shapes to track the "laughter of three girls / on a soundless walk," although it is unclear, syntactically, who is walking soundlessly—the girls or the speaker? We are forced to pivot to the "vitrified snow," and then the neologistic "lumpenbroletariat." In the original Polish version, the phrase is *lumpensportowiec*, which carries the connotations of Karl Marx's famous *lumpenproletariat*, while *sportowiec* means "athlete" or "sportsman." When combined with "lumpen," however, the implication is more in line with the frumpy "athleisure" or perhaps football hooligans in tracksuits. Yet with so many of the poems in *The Squatters' Gift* raising the visibility of socioeconomic and urban precarity, the Marxist component of the term is important. Rather than deploy something like "athleisure" or "tracksuitors"—the latter of which carried pleasant assonance that could reinforce a sense of movement within the poem—"lumpenbroletariat" offered a solution that preserved the Marx allusion while pointing to the problematic aspects of a sporty "bro culture." Considering that Rybicki's poems are reflective "not of crystallized views or fortified . . . religious dogmas . . . but a free-thinking spirit, usually condemned to (and for) vagrancy" (Woźniak, translation mine), it was helpful to keep in mind the figures being described in these poems, while allowing for translational flexibility to navigate the ever-shifting borders of his poetic cartography.

I got double-fucking-dragoned in Bratislava
& was going to Vienna with a black eye,
with an idea on how to spell Lviv's ł
(ll) & I thought:

En route from Bratislava to Vienna for a hopeful encounter with the poet Oswald Egger (long associated with the latter city), the speaker gets assaulted and leaves with a black eye as an unwanted souvenir. Yet, amazingly, afterwards he ponders the creative minutiae of language: “an idea on how to spell Lviv’s l / (ll).” Combining “l” with the Polish “l” is perhaps a reverberation of the shifting borders of the city of Lviv, once part of Poland (now located in western Ukraine; Lviv was also the birthplace of Zbigniew Herbert, a Polish poet widely recognized in the Anglophone sphere). However, even in the midst of bodily harm, the volley of languages is nothing if not relentless, continually migrating within the translation zone of one language/culture reacting to another, one line or phrase resounding and proliferating, one Rybicki poem transforming into the next.

The “unsettling transfiguration[s]” which Retallack welcomes as a key feature of her poethical wager and the embrace of unpredictability are also implied in Jerzy Jarniewicz’s legislator-translator model. In his influential essay “The Translator as the Creator of the Canon,” Jarniewicz outlines the characteristics of what he identifies as “but two of the most interesting species” of translator, the *ambassador* and the *legislator*. While the ambassador brings into the target language a spate of widely regarded masterpieces from the source language and culture, the aims of the legislator are decidedly more personal:

This type of translator realizes that each translation becomes a fact of the literature of the language to which they translate. . . . For such a translator, the hierarchies, rankings or lists existing abroad do not matter in the least. They choose the texts for translation by themselves, guided not by the fact that they are representative for the culture from which they originate, but because their translation may enter into a *creative dialogue with the native literature*, offering it new paradigms, new languages, and new criteria. The translator of the second species establishes a new artistic law for their native literature (and if they happen to be authors, also for their own writing). (Jarniewicz, emphasis mine)

In Jarniewicz's view, the legislator-translator is one who privileges interpersonal relationships over the "pecking order" and may eschew deference to decorum or critical authority. Furthermore, like Rybicki—who, one might add, has no qualms dispensing with decorum—poetry translators have existed within the margins of the sharing economy (and long before we even had the term *sharing economy*, frankly). As Jarniewicz reminds us, poetry translators, unlike prose translators, frequently labor at their own risk and according to their own prerogatives. While publishers choose prose for translation (and the laws of the marketplace often cater to readers' tastes), translators *choose* poetry, often on the basis of personal interests and tastes (Jarniewicz). Lawrence Venuti goes even further, emphasizing a clear benefit to translating poetry: "[R]eleased from the constraint to turn a profit, poetry translation is more likely to encourage experimental strategies that can reveal what is unique about translation as a linguistic and cultural practice" (174). Rybicki's socioeconomic urban precarity perhaps similarly allows for his work to be "released from the constraint to turn a profit" (unless profit is understood as a form of contact) and, at the very least, does not punish a poetics of translation zones. Working outside of the more transactional dynamic of source-to-target language under contract or commission, a great deal of contemporary poetry translation is, to use Jarniewicz's term (presumably alluding to Shelley), *legislated* into existence by the translator's efforts, built upon an empathetic relationship between translator and poet and/or poem, and a desire for that poetry to be rendered visible to readers in the target language. Moreover, the potential increase in visibility and readership which translation can generate may be considerably greater than in the source language, particularly when the target language is used as widely as English.

Jarniewicz asserts that our view of foreign literature is primarily framed by translators, not literary critics or historians. Outside of the native country or culture, its canonical literature relies almost entirely upon what translations of those works exist and are accessible (Jarniewicz).

For his part, Rybicki also “legislates” the wider visibility of poets such as Oswald Egger and Rolf Brinkmann—with the poems “HUNTING FOR OSWALD EGGER” and “EXCERPTS FROM BRINKMANN,” respectively—in Poland and beyond, while his poetic translation zone is populated with numerous other literary figures, including Polish poets Tadeusz Różewicz and Krzysztof Karasek, Czech poet and publisher Petr Motyl, and the central figure of Dadaism, Romanian poet Tristan Tzara. If Retallack’s poethics generates enthusiasm for the unknown that one may encounter in a translation zone and serves as an entryway into translating Rybicki, Jarniewicz’s legislator-translator provides a model for the results of such efforts. Given these individuated prerogatives and what Jarniewicz describes as the “creative dialogue” these translations espouse, such energies can be seen as quintessential for legislating the poetic translation zone which Rybicki’s work inhabits.

One such quintessential example of the convergence between Retallack’s poethics and Jarniewicz’s legislator model can be seen in my translation of Rybicki’s poem “To Swallow a Shadow—” (“JEŚĆ CIEN—” in Polish). The poem begins:

To Swallow a Shadow—
 these words are
 nothing more than
 tobacco specks
 on a sheet of paper
 (a mouth full of skeletons);
 me, out of my head,
 like a ball rolling towards the pocket. (32)

Initially, when I encountered the line “pustostan pełno szkieletów,” I erroneously saw the word “pustostan” (a squat or vacant apartment) as “buzia” (mouth) and translated the line as “a mouth full of skeletons.” This almost certainly had to do with the fact that my child was using the word “buzia” quite often, so that word was at the front of my mind. With a poem called “To Swallow a Shadow—” my mind was primed to see a connection to an open mouth, as if seeing the body part was a kind of psychological afterimage.

Naturally, when revising the manuscript and with book proofs, I had the opportunity to change the line. Yet I did not. Why? In part, because I viewed the “error” of my (mis)reading as an opportunity for reflection and the embrace of unpredictability. A mouth can be seen as an emptying space, as the termination point of a river, or simply a space that expels words or sounds. The surrealistic image of “a mouth full of skeletons” echoed

parts of other poems within *The Squatters' Gift*; also, the psychoacoustics of the line in aggregate felt right in spirit, if not in literal sense. As Simon argues,

[t]he translator emerges as a full participant in the stories of modernity that are enacted across urban space—modernity understood as an awareness of the plurality of codes, a thinking with and through translation, a continual testing of the limits of expression. Translators are *flâneurs* of a special sort, adding language as another layer of dissonance to the clash of histories and narratives on offer in the streets and passageways. (*Cities* 6)

While Rybicki's speaker might be squatting in a building emblematic of urban decay, I would argue, again echoing Retallack, that his "ability to play, that is, engage with the material world outside our minds via the active imagination, is our way of participating in the real" (25–26). Given the myriad shifts in form, style, diction, and tone, in addition to the book's iconoclasm, surely the translator has some room (pun intended) for a bit of creative mischief.

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Rybicki's anti-dogmatic formal approach (Zajac)—the sheer scope of linguistic modes and locales—echoes Retallack's call to proactively involve oneself in "otherness and unintelligibility" with "robustly nuanced reasonableness," and a similar kind of conscientiousness and intrepidity is needed from the translator of such work. In doing so, legislator-translators *à la* Jarniewicz can act as an invaluable countermeasure to the growing currents of nationalism, tribalism, and the myriad forms of xenophobia. As Simon argues,

[t]he intense transactions of the translation zone put pressure on the idea that the transfer of ideas occurs between a "foreign" source text and a "local" target readership. In the spaces of borderlands or nodal cities, members of diverse cultures are neighbours and share a single territory. This means that the frames of language exchange must be recast to respond to more subtle understandings of the relation between language, territory and identity. ("The Translation Zones" 183)

Rybicki and his poems are "always somewhere else, perpetually on the road," whether it is Silesia, Slovakia, Austria or outer space, and "only the pilgrim traces of someone who has just left remain" (Rojek, translation

mine). An engagement with poetry so replete with neologisms and phrasal volleys can be, at turns, disorienting and liberating. However, as Retallack reminds us: “Forms that move the imagination out of bounds toward pungent transgressions, piquant unintelligibilities intrude into our tangible surroundings. They maintain an irritating presence, pleasurable or not, as radically unfinished thought. They give the reader real work to do” (48). The vibrant, tendentiously multilingual poetic translation zone which Rybicki inhabits—whether in an abandoned stadium or a cobblestoned alleyway, imagining the geometry of the Big Bang or pondering the nuances of the alphabet after being assaulted in transit—adds friction to any static notion of “foreign” sources or “local” targets. Moreover, if “Rybicki learns from book to book to live with himself as a multitude” (Glosowitz 265, translation mine), such a Whitmanesque expansiveness is not limited to the subject matter or the poetic modes of voice and address, but also includes a crowd of languages and architectures, even encroaching on the nonhuman with his use of birdsong. In the same way that Venuti speaks of hearing different “Englishes” growing up (Ray), Rybicki’s “Polishes” are an evolving zone of languages. These poems can change locations, languages, and layouts at breakneck speed, or else the speaker can slow down to marvel at polygons or puke. Consequently, the translator of Rybicki’s work not only needs to be attuned to the unpredictable, in Retallack’s terms, but to welcome it, as well as legislate, per Jarniewicz, and migrate his work into the target language(s). Richard Buckminster Fuller once wrote: “We’re all astronauts on a little spaceship called Earth” (see Charrière); Rybicki would change the scale from the interstellar to the terrestrial and retort: “The. Word. Rotates. Like. A. Tornado” (28). It is precisely within that tornado of a translation zone that the poet and translator may reside.

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