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***, and: Rhinoceros

Tadeusz Różewicz (bio)

Translated by Joanna T. Huss (bio)

I was born a rhinoceros with thick skin and a horn on my nose

I wanted to become a butterfly but I was told that I had to be a rhinoceros

then I wanted to be a lark a stork but I was told it was impossible

I asked why—they told me because you are a rhinoceros

I wanted to be a monkey or even a parrot!

but I was told...NO

I dreamt I had ever so delicate pink skin and a nose just like Cleopatra's

but I was reminded that I have very very thick skin and my horn is proof of my identity

you were you are and you will be a rhinoceros till your dying day [End Page 46]

my name is Tony I am a white rhinoceros! have never seen my homeland South Africa

my mom's name is Tessal was born in a zoo in one of the European capitals

I am an only child never got to play with other little rhinoceroses

I was brought up behind very thick bars alongside my mom I don't remember my dad my mom told me that shortly after the wedding Dad returned to his city am told his name was Diogenes

My name is Tony when was little I wanted to be a butterfly but they told me that I was born a rhinoceros that I have to be a rhinoceros

I wanted to be a sparrow because sparrows were able to fly out of our cage they were free they chirped happily so I wanted to be a sparrow but they told me I can't be a sparrow [End Page 47]

I asked why—because you are a rhinoceros and will always be a rhinoceros with thick skin and a horn on your nose poor eyesight and a small brain

that seemed unfair to me

When I was bigger I would go with my mom onto an animal run in the neighborhood lived a troop of monkeys

monkeys are a happy bunch they copulate without care without condoms they scratch their behinds delouse eat parasites they masturbate without worrying they will go to hell only the males are mean arrogant jealous the females display their colorful behinds not only to the males but to the whole wide world for which they do not get any money from television or playboy...but I've let my tongue run loose in the zoo we are visited by a strange species of monkey covered in all kinds of colorful rags and naked underneath they have hair only on their heads and they carry their young in strollers

they drink eat and laugh all the time Mom told me that they are close relatives of orangutans [End Page 48] they're called homo sapiens and a long time ago they climbed down the tree of knowledge onto the wrong path

These degenerate monkeys hold auctions of white rhinoceroses in South Africa and sell our females for 50,000 pounds they run something called a "safari" and from our horns they make a kind of powder for their impotent males

My mom told me that their females carry their pregnancies for nine months Our females do it for seventeen months and during that time they don't smoke cigarettes they don't drink vodka don't go to discos or watch horror films on TV

an Old Orangutan told me all kinds of terrible things about these monkeys and I thought to myself how good it is to be a rhinoceros

last night I dreamt I was a parrot and I got quite scared [End Page 49]

Tadeusz Różewicz

Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-1994) was a Polish poet, playwright, and writer. He is widely credited with reinventing Polish poetics in the wake of the Holocaust. His notable works include the poetry collections *Niepokój* (Anxiety, 1947) and *Nożyk profesora* (The Professor's Knife, 2001) and the play *Białe małżeństwo* (White Wedding, 1975).