



Schulz / Forum
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Who is he? Who was he (for himself, for others)? Who is this Schulz to us? And who is the “Schulz” who was seen and talked about so differently by others – his contemporaries? He comes (to us) suddenly and unexpectedly, out of nowhere. After all, he has been dead for a long time. He stands before us in silence, he gives us some signs – but what do they mean? He wants something, but his demands fall on deaf ears. Eventually, he moves away, leaving traces of his existence that fade away over time, becoming less and less legible and understandable.

The great goal of traditional biography has been (and continues to be) the search for the hidden centre of identity of its protagonist. Finding a formula that integrates the history of the “I” transforming over time would allow us to answer the fundamental question of who Schulz was. It is futile, though, to look for a satisfactory answer to this question (that is, one encompassing life in toto) in hundreds, thousands of Schulzological studies. Most likely, such an answer cannot be given – because it does not exist. Therefore, there is no alternative but to limit ourselves to creating one-off formulas that cover only a part of Schulz’s life, and never reveal the hidden meanings of some events, of which trace remains (in biographical documents).

The authors of the essays included in this volume try to determine the central points of Schulz’s identity/biography – each on their own. The essays were written in the last decade and were published in the first sixteen issues of *Schulz/Forum*, a journal published by Schulz Research Lab at the University of Gdańsk.

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Identities and Biographies. Us

Third person singular would be misleading. And it would distance (us) from Bruno Schulz and his life. Thinking (and writing) about identity and biography, woven into one anthropological knot, requires us to travel many paths and find numerous dispersed points in someone else's life. The categorical nature of the singular form ("identity", "biography") strengthens in vain our hope that there might perhaps be such a thing as one (full, complete, comprehensive) biography of Bruno Schulz and one of his identities that underlies and effectively unites this biography. Instead, though, it is impossible to determine the singular identity that would encompass all events stretching from the birth of Bruno, son of the Drohobych cloth merchant Jakub, to his tragic death in 1942. During his life, Schulz had (created) many partial identities; in this multiplication and dispersion of himself, in this division of his personhood into multiple identities, he was no exception. This multitude of formulas for the existence of "each of us" is required by the course of life – as long as it lasts long enough to be internally differentiated. Therefore, any project of creating one biography based on some overarching principle of identity that would cover Schulz's entire life seems impossible to rely on. In biographical discourse, the coherent stream of life spreads and divides into numerous branches, while identity diversifies. It can hardly be otherwise. If the biographer does not reduce the concept of identity to its "passport function" (name, surname, date of birth – and finally death) and boldly goes beyond the presentation of events in time, they will not find a formula that connects the beginning with the end of their protagonist's life, because – in multiple acts of being – the protagonist more or less radically and consciously transcends himself and the previously achieved states of his own existence.

Today, we are generally quite happy that a person's life can be presented in so many ways. We assume that the failure to build a biographical whole (based on one or another identity formula riskily adopted by the biographer) is inevitable. In such approximations, "Bruno Schulz" (from one biography or another) will always turn out to be only a construct, more or less arbitrary. But these arbitrary and risky constructs make up "multiple portraits" (to use an adequate phrase from an old publishing series) which presents from different points of view a protagonist who eluded each of his biographers. However, fundamental questions remain unanswered.

Who is he? Who was he (for himself, for others)? Who is this Schulz to us? And who is the "Schulz" who was seen and talked about so differently by others – his contemporaries? He comes (to us) suddenly and unexpectedly, out of nowhere. After all, he has been dead for a long time. He stands before us in silence, he gives us some signs – but what do they mean? He wants something, but his demands fall on deaf ears. Eventually, he moves away, leaving traces of his existence that fade away over time, becoming less and less legible and understandable.

The great goal of traditional biography has been (and continues to be) the search for the hidden centre of identity of its protagonist. Finding a formula that integrates the

history of the “I” transforming over time would allow us to answer the fundamental question of who Schulz was. It is futile, though, to look for a satisfactory answer to this question (that is, one encompassing life in toto) in hundreds, thousands of Schulzological studies. Most likely, such an answer cannot be given – because it does not exist. Therefore, there is no alternative but to limit ourselves to creating one-off formulas that cover only a part of Schulz’s life, and never reveal the hidden meanings of some events, of which trace remains (in biographical documents).

Schulz’s identities are intransitive. Anchored in subsequent periods of his life, in the “here and now”, they do not explain earlier and later existential conditions. “Brunio”, a student of the Drohobych junior high school, is not the same as Schulz, a teacher of drawing and handicraft at the same school – though the two would have probably liked each other very much if they had met during a lesson. However, none of them would identify with Schulz the war refugee. If asked, they would probably answer “It’s not me anymore” or “It’s not me yet”. The teacher would probably be closer to the artist who revealed the secrets of his sexuality in his drawings from the early 1920s, as well as in the then-created *Booke of Idolatry*. And there are still more identities: the writer making his debut with *The Cinnamon Shops*, a friend of Witkacy and Gombrowicz, Nałkowska’s lover, Szelińska’s fiancé – and at the same time: the author of insightful self-portraits and schematic icons of himself... This multiplication (and later fragmentation) of “Schulz” seems endless. Because, in addition, Schulz himself suggested such powerful identity tropes as self-castration from the dream described in a letter to Stefan Schuman or masochism, which – in a letter to the American psychiatrist Henryk Wegrocki – he saw as the centre of his worldview. The matter is not made easier by contemporary critics of Schulz, and later also by numerous Schulzologists, who, when asked who he was, answered, for example, as follows: a demonologist, a poseur (for one doctor’s wife from Wilcza), another Kafka, a masochist, Bruno the Great, a sage (of Kabbalah), a victim of the Holocaust.

The authors of the essays included in this volume try to determine the central points of Schulz’s identity/biography – each on their own. As a result, these points resemble a map of the islands in the Cyclades archipelago (and each island is a nymph transformed by angry Neptune). The essays were written in the last decade and were published in the first sixteen issues of *Schulz/Forum*, a journal published by Schulz Research Lab at the University of Gdańsk.

What’s next? Which of the identity formulas presented below should Schulz’s biography be based on? This will be decided, perhaps, by the rhetorical effectiveness of the authors who stand their ground here. But you can also accept them all at once, with all the benefits of the multitude. Because “Schulz” – to whom we keep returning, and whom we keep creating again and again – is precisely this multitude. The truth of his life (and therefore also of his biography) does not belong to “me”, to each of us, readers and Schulzologists individually, but “to us”, to all those who failed (or will still fail) in confrontation with Schulz if they absolutize their point of view. The truth of biography is collective and cumulative, eternally unready and elusive – like the truth of a story.

Piotr Millati: Was Bruno Schulz a Writer?

1

Why such a question? The answer to it seems simple and trivial. All we need to do is reach for any decent lexicon of 20th-century writers. Schulz's contemporary critics and readers had no doubts about this either. Even more so, a question of this kind would hardly cross the minds of those who read *The Cinnamon Shops* or *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* today.

And yet, as ridiculous as this question may sound, it is worth asking. Not for meaningless, dubious provocation, but for us to realize that if Schulz was indeed a writer, he was completely different from others. If we juxtapose him with Zofia Nałkowska, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz or Witold Gombrowicz, who at some point were part of his closest artistic circle, then in many respects there is more that divides than unites them.

The common point is, of course, the fact that Schulz wrote texts that have become a permanent part of the history of world literature. But did this automatically make him a writer like those mentioned here?

A writer is someone who writes books – this would probably be the simplest, most reasonable definition. When I use this word, I will mean this most typical case of a writer, because it is the clearest opposition to Schulz's peculiar writerly existence.

For this reason, what I am about to say will sound trivial and its pretentiousness will grind your teeth, but elementary facts are sometimes trivial and pretentious, so I will take the liberty of expressing these few clichéd "observations".

Most writers are people who cannot live without writing. For them, writing is an irresistible internal compulsion that remains strong for most of their lives. Although the process of creation itself usually requires effort, for a writer writing is as natural as breathing. You could say it is almost a physiological activity. A writer's entire existence revolves around this one most important activity, and the rest of their life is subordinated to it with cold ruthlessness, often at the expense of their loved ones. Writers feel that they were born to write and that only writing gives proper meaning to their lives. If the writer performs another profession, it is only to make a living, and, therefore, to write. The books they write are sometimes better, sometimes worse, but they are published with reasonable regularity. Labour can be long, difficult and painful, but when it happens, after some time another idea for a book appears and demands to be brought into the world.

Schulz wrote very little, started quite late and the period in which he was an actual writer was relatively short. It can be said that writing stories happened to him rather than was a permanent predisposition of his artistic existence. It was like a short-lived but blinding flash or a powerful lightning that loses all energy a mere moment after it occurs.

From the perspective of his readers, Schulz debuted with a masterpiece¹. It was not preceded by any works written at a young age, no unsuccessful writing attempts, no early underdeveloped texts published in second-rate magazines, which are usually a necessary stage on the path of a writer to achieve artistic maturity².

He belonged to a peculiar family of writers who wrote only one yet brilliant book³. Its members include Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa with his *The Leopard*, Ralph Elisson with *The Invisible Man* and Harper Lee with her *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To achieve what other writers work hard for all their lives he needed only two modest collections of stories. One of them would suffice, though. If Schulz had published only *The Cinnamon Shops* or only *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, his position in the literary world would not have suffered much. Also, if he had managed to write the legendary *Messiah*, it would not have made him a greater writer in our eyes than he is now.

Let us now imagine Nałkowska as the author of only *Women*, or Witkacy, who would have written only *622 Downfalls of Bungo* and nothing else, or Gombrowicz, if he ended his writing adventure with *Memoir from Adolescence*. None of them would be talked about or written about today to an extent even close to what is said and written about Schulz.

2

Most of his stories were written in late 1920s and early 1930s. Previously, he mostly satisfied his need to write artistic prose through intense correspondence⁴:

-
- 1 Earlier, Jerzy Jarzębski drew attention to this in J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 6.
 - 2 As this type of text could be considered the one published by Schulz at the beginning of 1922 in the biweekly of Borysław oil workers entitled *Undula*, which was recently found by Łesia Chomycz in Lviv. Although it is not as outstanding as the stories included in *Sklepy Cynamonowe (The Cinnamon Shops)*, it was undoubtedly a literary success.
 - 3 *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* can basically be treated as one two-volume collection of short stories. Most of the texts included in *Sanatorium* were written before the publication of *Shops*.
 - 4 The thesis proposed by Jerzy Ficowski that all Schulz's work comes from his letters is now giving way to the belief that texts constituting his literary prose were also written in parallel to the correspondence. Later Ficowski also softened the categorical nature of his beliefs. See editorial note to: B. Schulz, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 2: *Sklepy cynamonowe*, edited by J. Jarzębski, critical commentary by S. Rosiek, linguistic ed. by M. Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2018, p. 151.

“I used to express myself by writing letters: it was my only literary work at that time” – he said, in a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz⁵.

As we know, he wrote thousands of letters, only some of which survived. It was an activity that Schulz was involved in throughout his life. Unlike actual writing, it was not very much subject to his unstable emotional states. No unfavourable objective circumstances managed to block it permanently, whereas they so easily impeded Schulz’s fiction writing. He kept up the correspondence with Anna Płockier continuously both during the Soviet and Nazi occupation, when every day meant the threat of a sudden and brutal death.

Therefore, his writing ability usually did not falter if he had a familiar recipient and a friendly reader on the other end. He seduced and enchanted her through his words as if in a hushed voice, forming hypnotizing phrases like some magical incantation. In this unique aura of mutual closeness and deep understanding, as in a favourable climate, sentences, images, ideas matured and were later used as material for stories.

This type of writing was not an end in itself. It meant establishing and deepening a unique and intimate relationship with a specific person. The text became an indispensable tool for strengthening this bond.

On the other hand, Schulz often lost sight of the recipient of his letters, pushing her deep into the background and placing her in a passive role, without her own voice. The content often detached itself from the author, becoming an almost autonomous literary work.

The first example we know was the completely lost correspondence with Emanuel Pilpel – a long-time fan and admirer of Schulz’s work from Drohobych. Delighted with Schulz’s letters, Pilpel read them to the then very young Regina Silberner in the early 1920s, prophesying with a solemnly raised finger: “Remember what I’m going to tell you now: Bruno will be a great writer”⁶.

The co-presence of these two elements – the real recipient and the literary text – was almost the *sine qua non* of his literary activity. Separating them, that is, going beyond correspondence and writing for writing’s sake, with an abstract reader in mind, could be considered a short-lived episode and a quantitative margin compared to what was Schulz’s most common form of literary expression.

5 B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for print by J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2012, p. 120.

6 R. Silberner, *Strzępy wspomnień. Przyczynek do biografii zewnętrznej Brunona Schulza*, Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy 1984, p. 12.

3

In his youth, Schulz did not think about becoming a writer. We cannot find any evidence that he linked his artistic fulfilment to literature. There is no mention of the dreams so typical of writers who want to make writing great novels their life purpose. No dreams of literary fame. No “apprenticeship” for a famous writer, which sometimes results in poor literary texts marked by the stigma of inept imitation.

A writerly (but also artistic) calling is usually born early and once it becomes conscious and accepted, a person is determined to make it come true. Like Hermann Hesse, who knew from the age of thirteen that he would be a poet or nothing.

From his early school years, Schulz’s favourite school subjects were arts and the Polish language⁷. His literary talent shone in public for the first time in one of the first grades of junior high school, when he wrote a long story about a horse. The teacher of Polish, moved by it, showed it to the headmaster, who kept it for himself as a curio. This act of headmaster’s recognition for an inconspicuous student was widely commented on at school⁸.

But Schulz saw his artistic fulfilment in a completely different field. As we all know, from an early age he was passionate about drawing: “I couldn’t speak yet when I covered all the papers and the edges of newspapers with doodles that attracted the attention of those around me...”⁹ – he wrote in an often-quoted quasi-letter to Witkacy. In *The Age of Genius* we can find a wonderful literary image of the beginnings of what is undoubtedly his greatest and most enduring artistic passion.

At school, he was well known for his drawings, which already obsessively revolved around the same disturbing motifs¹⁰. The breakthrough that was to awaken his desire to become an artist was when as a fourteen-year-old he saw art nouveau illustrations by Ephraim Moses Lilien to *Lieder des Ghetto*: “A kind of transformation took place in me then. Lilien powerfully fertilized my inner world, which manifested itself in my early, youthful, inept creativity. [...] Lilien was the first spring of my sensitivity, my mystical marriage with art [...]”¹¹ – he

⁷ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 20.

⁸ Michał Chajes – Schulz’s school friend – wrote about it in a letter to Jerzy Ficowski. See J. Kandzióra, *Poeta w labiryncie historii. Studia o pisarskich rolach Jerzego Ficowskiego*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2016, p. 221.

⁹ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 105.

¹⁰ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 24.

¹¹ B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 7: *Szkice krytyczne*, ed. by W. Bolecki, comments and footnotes by M. Wójcik, linguistic ed. by P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 128.

wrote many years after this event in an essay dedicated to an artist born, like him, in Drohobych.

We do not know if Schulz ever considered studying literature (the most obvious choice for those who consider writing). Instead, he wanted to study painting. Ultimately, he was stopped from doing so by his elder brother's sober advice to choose something more practical. It must have fallen on the fertile ground of his low self-esteem, because he eventually ended up in the architecture department of the Lviv University of Technology, which he never completed, though. Later, in Vienna, where he and part of his family escaped from the war ravaging Galicia, he resumed his studies for a short time, but he did it half-heartedly. He explained the reason for their final abandonment in an application to the ministry for permission to teach drawing at the Drohobych high school: "[In Vienna], under the influence of works of old art, the growing attraction to painting prompted me to give up my studies of architecture and devote myself to painting"¹². It was then that he finally became convinced that painting was the only field with which he wanted to link his future¹³.

In the early 1920s, Schulz drew and painted a lot, while working intensively on perfecting his craft. Then, the most important series of his drawings was created – *The Booke of Idolatry*. He managed to exhibit his works here and there, and sell something from time to time, but all this did not translate into financial success that would allow him to make a living. Hence, a moment later, he sadly had to look for a job at school. Before this happened, however, Schulz made one last attempt to satisfy his desire to permanently connect his life with painting – he tried to get into the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. In April 1923, he appeared before the ten-person examination board. However, he was not admitted. Probably it was not because of lack of his skills, but – as Joanna Sass, who described this story, suspects¹⁴ – because he was already too well-formed as an artist, so he was not very susceptible to the impact of academic education¹⁵.

Unlike in writing, he was interested in the visual arts till the end of his days. He was no longer actively engaged in literature, but his ambition to develop himself in painting remained alive. Its last trace can be found in a letter to the painter Anna Płockier, written exactly a year before his death in Nazi-occupied Drohobych: "Would you consider it hopeless to accept me as your painting student? Could you, perhaps with Marek's help, offer me a course in painting free from the academicism? In return, I could share my writing experience with

¹² B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 227.

¹³ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁴ J. Sass, daily entries in *Kalendarium życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza*.

¹⁵ See <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/11-kwietnia-1923> (retrieved: March 26, 2020).

you”¹⁶. However, this never happened. A few days later, Anna Płockier and Marek Zwillich were murdered by Ukrainian militia.

4

Every great writer is first a great reader. Outstanding literature always originates from prior reading of outstanding literature. Schulz always read a lot, using the free resources of the Drohobych bookstore run by the father of his close friend Emanuel Pilpel. The second important source of reading material was the rich collection of books that belonged to another friend from Drohobych – Stanisław Weingarten. It contained books from various areas – from natural sciences, sociology, history and economics to philosophy and poetry. Jerzy Ficowski would like to see Schulz’s long-term relationship with the Pilpel book collection as a stimulus, thanks to which “the writer matured in him” and “the visual artist emerged”¹⁷. That might have been the case, though fiction was not a particularly privileged genre among his readings. We know little about the writers of the so-called *belles-lettres* who were important to Schulz during this period. The only name he repeatedly mentions with almost idolatrous reverence and which often returns in the correspondence is Rilke – first a poet, then a prose writer. Later, there are Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka, too.

Jerzy Ficowski links the beginning of Schulz’s serious interest in writing with his friendship with Władysław Riff, whom he met in the early 1920s and who was an almost ten-year-younger promising prose writer. It was he who inspired Schulz to make his own literary attempts¹⁸ around 1925. According to Ficowski, the following stories were written at that time: *July Night*, *Second Autumn*, *Edzio*, *Pensioner*, *Loneliness*, *Dodo* and most likely *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which many years later would constitute the core of the second volume of Schulz’s fiction¹⁹. They were preceded by intensive correspondence with Riff. For both sides, it quickly became a pretext for turning it into a literary work.

However, the latest discovery by a Ukrainian researcher shifts the moment of Schulz’s actual literary initiation to January 1922, when he published his previously completely unknown story in the “Świt” magazine. It was *Undula*, signed with the pseudonym Marcei Weron. Łesia Chomycz (the researcher mentioned above) dates the creation of *Undula* to the spring of 1920 or 1921 and assumes

¹⁶ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 215.

¹⁷ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 56–58.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 58.

that it could have been a text intended by Schulz as a literary commentary to his drawings²⁰.

It is difficult to determine whether this undermines Riff's role in awakening Schulz's ambition to write on his own – we still do not know when exactly they met. Either way, Riff became a very characteristic figure for him, someone he was always looking for – a close confidant for his thoughts and a companion on distant journeys of his imagination. Riff was also supposed to be an indispensable catalyst for Schulz's literary work, allegedly partly inspired by his friend's letters. Riff died of tuberculosis in 1927. All his works, along with letters from Schulz, were burnt by the sanitary services, who wanted to prevent the spreading of the disease. Therefore, we will never know to what extent Schulz was his literary debtor, as it was suggested by Ficowski, who, as proof of this dependence, presents fragments of Riff's letters – as recalled by Adam Ważyk – very similar to Schulz's prose²¹. I would not attach much importance to this account, as it is only in the memory of Ważyk. Besides, the world we encounter in Schulz's work is so individual and unique that it is difficult to imagine it to become the subject of anyone's imitation without turning into an automatic machine, not turning into his caricature. The artistically pathetic writing by Kazimierz Truchanowski, who imitated-plagiarised Schulz's writing, is a good case in point.

Almost immediately after Riff's death, Schulz started writing letters to Stefania Juer, a seventeen-year-old girl he met in Zakopane; she became a painter later known as Dretler-Flin. He wrote hundreds of letters to her. These were several-page story-letters, sent regularly two or three times a week in the years 1927–1932. Like most of Schulz's letters, they were lost during the war²².

Schulz met the Jewish writer Deborah Vogel through Witkacy in 1930. Based on Schulz's own words, Jerzy Ficowski concluded that *The Cinnamon Shops* was ultimately written out of correspondence with Debora Vogel²³. However, this would be contradicted by the testimony of Zofia Nałkowska, who wrote in her *Diary* that when Schulz came to her at Easter 1933, the book had been ready for print for three years – even before he met the author of *Tog-Figurn* for the first time²⁴. Ficowski points out another contradiction: when, in July 1932, Schulz asked Stefan Szuman – an outstanding psychologist whose lectures

20 Ł. Chomycz, *Wokół wystawy w Borysławiu. O dwóch debiutach Brunona Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 14, 2019.

21 Ibidem, p. 57.

22 B. Schulz, *Sklepy cynamonowe*, p. 149.

23 "The Cinnamon Shops gradually emerged from my letters," he wrote in a letter to Romana Halpern. However, he failed to mention that he only meant his letters to Debora Vogel. Idem, *Księga listów*, s. 142.

24 Idem, *Sklepy cynamonowe*, p. 152.

he listened to in Żywiec – to read his stories, they had already been ready for print for two years²⁵.

Either way, *The Cinnamon Shops* was written relatively quickly. A similar eruption of literary creativity never happened to Schulz again. Later, he repeatedly tried to return to this wonderful state of spirit and mind in which he produced such wonderful literary works as *August* or *The Birds* one after another, as in some alchemical retort. However, with a few exceptions, he never succeeded again. As we remember, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* published in 1937 was largely an act of literary capitulation. The stories in this volume were mostly written a long time ago, in that “age of genius”.

Although it is customary to link Schulz’s birth as a writer with letters to Deborah Vogel, he himself saw this moment much earlier – if we believe the fictionalized memory of his former student, later poet and prose writer, Andrzej Chciuk.

Schulz allegedly confessed to him during one of their walks (in Drohobych there was a custom of walking favourite teachers home) that he “knew he would write” from the moment when, in June 1911, he accidentally became an eyewitness to the massacre of the inhabitants of Drohobych protesting against electoral abuse of power. More than thirty people died on the street and a hundred were injured. He was struck by “how easily the scum and vulture in a person unleash [...] It was that shock – as he was to say to Chciuk – without which a writer cannot be born”²⁶.

5

Since 1931, apart from *Spring*, *The Book*, *The Age of Genius* and *The Comet*, as well as the German short story *Die Heimkehr*, Schulz published hardly anything apart from columns in the press. However, for the next few years he would desperately struggle with the impossibility of creating his *magnum opus*, which was to be the novel *Messiah*. This literary impotence is worth further consideration. The phenomenon of “writer’s block” is well known and has often occurred even among the most prolific writers, but in the case of Schulz it may suspect something else.

We must accept the fact that *Messiah* never came to be. The rumour that it was handed over to some trusted person from outside the ghetto and the subsequent sensational information about the appearance of this book in various parts of the world is a literary myth born out of the need of imagination to repeat legends about the lost treasure.

²⁵ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 204.

²⁶ A. Chciuk, *Ziemia księżycowa. Druga opowieść o Księżwie Bałaku*, London 1972, p. 89.

When Schulz first decided not to write *Messiah* (and at the same time he had to confirm his position as a writer publishing a new book), he included fragments that were to be part of it in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. Those were the two stories entitled *The Book* and *The Age of Genius*. However, he did not abandon his plans to continue working on it. He wanted to write it again from scratch²⁷. Those attempts resulted in the creation of fragments which, as one can guess, were so inconsistent that they were not suitable for printing as an excerpt from a larger novel. That is why Schulz never published them in any magazine, which was common practice at that time. And it was they, not the entire *Messiah*, that were lost during the war²⁸.

It seems that writing *Messiah* was a non-starter from the very beginning, at least in the form in which Schulz had in mind.

Many factors contributed to this. One of them was the burden of impossible expectations imposed on the author. Almost immediately after his highly rated debut, Schulz entered the circles of well-known, respected and highly regarded Warsaw writers. Straight from the provincial Drohobych. In those circles, he observed strategies for designing a literary career typical of this professional group – something that was previously completely unknown to him, because it was contrary to the fundamentally intimate nature of his own artistry. His new acquaintances recognized him as a writer like themselves, pushing him onto a career path typical of professional writing. One of its basic principles is the opinion that a debut, even the most successful one, is only an introduction to taking root in the literary community. The decision to be or not to be made by a novice author is their second book, which should be at least as good as the first one. Schulz apparently succumbed to this pressure. The determination to “exceed” his debut with the next book is present, for example, in his application to the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Enlightenment for a paid leave, which would enable him to “concentrate all his strength completely on the artistic act of which he is capable [...]”, because “he is now at a point in his development where he must not stop at half-results”²⁹.

However, this was quite impossible. *The Cinnamon Shops* is an example of artistic perfection within the literary convention in which it was written. There are no better or worse texts among them, which we always encounter in the collections of stories even by the best writers. Each of them can be considered

²⁷ We know it from a letter to Romana Halpern of July 12, 1938, a letter from Witold Gombrowicz of July 19, 1938 and a letter from Artur Sandauer of the same day. See B. Schulz, *Book of Letters*, op. cit.

²⁸ Among Schulz's then-lost manuscripts, Ficowski also includes an almost finished book, which was supposed to consist of “four larger stories”. See J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 95. However, apart from fragmentary mentions of this work, in Schulz's correspondence there has been no trace that proves its existence.

²⁹ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 234–235.

a literary masterpiece. Schulz either wrote masterpieces or did not write at all. This was one of the phenomenal features of his writing.

And it must have been from the desire to write a book better than *The Cinnamon Shops* that Schulz's unfortunate idea to make *Messiah* a novel came from – a novel, that is, a form more appreciated and considered more mature than short stories associated mainly with debutantes.

However, up to that point Schulz had only written short stories, and some literary criticism. Not without a reason: these were usually texts with a rudimentary plot, but with extensive descriptive parts with a refined and detailed analysis of the world presented in them. The short story was the optimal literary form for his type of writing. The highly metaphorical poetic prose Schulz wrote, resembling a tangled thicket, was perfect for this purpose. However, it is difficult to imagine that it would be possible to write an entire novel in such language. The plot is the fundamental *raison d'être* of the novel³⁰.

Working on *Messiah* must have been like struggling with the problem of squaring the circle – it was doomed to artistic failure.

At some point, Schulz must have realized that *Messiah* could not be written in the language he had used so far. Perhaps that is why *The Book* and *The Age of Genius*, which were supposed to be fragments of this novel, and yet were stylistically no different from the stories from *The Cinnamon Shops*, were included in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*.

Therefore, he decided to change his current writing style. This is clearly indicated by Gombrowicz's comment regarding what Schulz wrote to him about *Messiah* in a previous (lost, unfortunately) letter: "As for your *Messiah*, it's hard for me to say anything [...] – if it gives you the opportunity to refresh yourself, so much the better! This postulate is important not for the sake of your art, but for yourself – mentally"³¹.

Earlier, Witkiewicz had encouraged him to fundamentally renew his writing: "[Witkacy] advises me to completely change the subject 'in order to stretch the fallopian tubes to make the final sperm ejaculation'"³² – Schulz reported his opinion in a letter to Romana Halpern.

As you can see, he also expected Schulz to deliver his life's work more outstanding than *The Cinnamon Shops*. At the same time, he expressed the belief that this could not be done by writing as before. In the eyes of this radical

30 An example of a literary failure in this field is Adam Ciompa's experimental novel entitled *Duże litery* (1933) or Andrzej Stasiuk's clearly oversized *Dukla* (1997). However, it is not certain what Schulz actually meant when he called *Messiah* a novel. In a quasi-letter to Witkacy, he calls *The Cinnamon Shops* an "autobiographical novel".

31 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 248.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 157.

avant-gardist, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which could be seen as a repetition of the previous book, seemed an act of self-plagiarism, and, therefore, a symptom of creative stagnation³³. By the way, Witkiewicz was a good example of how badly understood the phenomenon of Schulz's artistry was – of his organic connection with the language used in fiction. A few months after the publication of *Sanatorium*, Witkacy persuaded Schulz to do something completely natural for him, but completely impossible for Schulz – to write a “very strange theatre play”, which was a “stage synthesis of the ‘Cinnamons’”, promising to stage it in the theatre in Zakopane³⁴. This play, of course, was never written.

Schulz himself must have felt a prisoner of his own style and clearly wanted to simplify it. In a letter to Romana Halpern, he complained that he had not become a journalist because, by writing to the press every day, he would have developed “a certain casual, everyday form of writing”³⁵.

The problem was that he could only write in one, uniquely characteristic way. While most writers operated with great freedom in various registers of language, Schulz moved almost exclusively on a very narrow cornice of the style he had developed³⁶. Therefore, even his occasional reader will recognize every sentence written by Schulz, just as Leśmian's reader will recognize every line of the poet, too.

If I were to point out someone among the writers who was the most radical opposite of Schulz's linguistic “stiffening”, it would be Italo Calvino. This stylistic virtuoso wrote almost every book in a completely different manner and if it were not for his name on the covers, no one would have guessed that their author was the same person.

Let us recall here that, in Schulz's opinion, the purpose of art is not mimesis of the visible world, but the expression of the deepest and the most unique contents of the artist's spirit given to him at the dawn of his existence³⁷. The unique language with which Schulz expressed these matters had to be organically connected with his deepest self; it was the fullest and most precise expression of this “I”. One could even say that this language was Schulz himself, and Schulz

33 After the publication of *Sanatorium*, Witkiewicz did not show the same enthusiasm for it as he did for *The Cinnamon Shops*. In a letter to Schulz, the entire reaction to his reading of *Sanatorium* were these courtesy words: “some of the pages are wonderful!” – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 289.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem, p. 172.

36 This “almost” refers to the reviews ordered from him by “Wiadomości Literackie”. Here his language is more “factual” and greatly simplified. However, in extended critical pieces about books that fascinated him (*Czudzoziemka*, *Ferdydurke*, *Granica*), or in essays (*Powstają legendy*) Schulz uses a style very similar to his prose.

37 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 106.

was his own language³⁸. Changing it would be like changing your skin or, to use another colloquial expression, climbing into someone else's skin. Therefore, it was simply impossible.

This had significant consequences for his writing – such language could be used within a narrow range of genres and forms, and in a limited thematic field.

6

If we take a closer look at Schulz's correspondence, it turns out that his problems with writing began shortly after the publication of *The Cinnamon Shops* in December 1933³⁹. These difficulties would then be a constantly recurring motif in his letters. The writing impotence that befell him would translate into recurring complaints, grumblings and self-accusations⁴⁰. It would significantly contribute to the growth of frustration, which at some point turned into a severe clinical depression that not only disorganized his life but also required treatment. It is significant that this block affected his drawing to a lesser extent⁴¹.

For the first time, Schulz confided in Zenon Waśniewski about this long-standing condition that had been troubling him in April 1934: "I must be mentally ill. [...] I don't write anything, even the rewriting of something already written disgusts me insurmountably"⁴².

Two months later, nothing had changed in this matter: "I am in a deep decline of spirit and it seems that I can write nothing more! I console myself and convince myself that it's neurasthenia, but this aversion to the pen has been going on for over six months and it still gives me some food for thought"⁴³.

38 Schulz wrote a similar thing about Lilien, whom he admired: "He immediately found his own style, which was such an adequate expression of his interior, so fused with it, that he never felt the need to look for other ways; his inner world was crystallized and closed like few others" – B. Schulz, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 140.

39 Stanisław Rosiek devoted a lot of space to this matter in a very insightful text on the manuscript of Schulz's *A Second Autumn*. Inevitably, when writing this article, I used the same fragments of Schulz's letters in many places, and my findings partially coincide with his comments. See S. Rosiek, *Jak pisał Bruno Schulz? Domysły na podstawie sześciu stron rękopisu jednego opowiadania*, "Schulz/Forum" 4, 2014.

40 Józef Olejniczak also presented documentation of his creative impotence based on Schulz's correspondence, but this problem became a pretext for considerations other than those presented here. See J. Olejniczak, *Udręka tekstu – tekst udręki. Bruno Schulz – pisanie/czytanie*, in: idem, *Pryncypia i marginesy Schulza. Eseje*, Gdańsk 2019.

41 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 185.

42 Ibidem, p. 67.

43 Ibidem, p. 69.

The last mention of this topic appears in a letter to Anna Płockier of October 4, 1941: “I am not doing anything now, I am contemplating my inner wealth, my scraps and the collections collected in my life”⁴⁴.

There was a catalogue of similar confessions in his letters written between these two points in time.

Schulz repeatedly tried to understand the reasons for his creative impotence. He multiplied many, often contradictory, hypotheses on this subject. Ultimately, however, it remained an unsolvable puzzle for him. The most common reason he provided was, of course, the school he hated, which, as he claimed, took up all his time and energy that he would otherwise have devoted to writing. He lived with this illusion until the next holidays, when it turned out that despite favourable conditions and two months at his full disposal, he was unable to write anything anyway.

Therefore, he could not consider such an excuse as justified, especially since *The Cinnamon Shops* was written when he was working as a teacher at the same school, and the job was not an obstacle at that time⁴⁵.

Another reason for not writing was the inability to hide away from the ever-distracting world in some isolated place. Only there could he bring out his “inner silence” and immerse himself in the solitude that was always fertile for his writing. However, when he finally managed to find such an asylum – it was in Korostów near Skole⁴⁶, some village near Turka⁴⁷ or Boberka near Łomna – it turned out that it did not change anything either⁴⁸. And *The Cinnamon Shops* was written in conditions far from such an ideal – in his apartment in ul. Floriańska, where he shared two small rooms with a mentally ill sister, a dependent nephew, and a cousin⁴⁹.

Schulz would eventually begin to suspect that the reason for his block was located much deeper, inside himself. He would recognize that with age he had entered a sterile phase of life in which “something went wrong” in him, his childhood sensitivity had become blunted, his creative resources had been exhausted, and life-giving illusions had been dissipated, revealing the “naked skeleton of truth”⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 211.

⁴⁵ However, his hourly workload was lower at that time. Practical and technical classes have been added to drawing lessons.

⁴⁶ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 91. Letter to Zenon Waśniewski from August 4, 1937: “I had no consolation from this loneliness and I got rid of the old and rooted illusion in me that I was made for solitude”.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 139.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 90, 91, 92.

Reading literary journals irritated him at that time. He looked with envy at the productivity of others, then unattainable for him⁵¹. Comparing himself with his writing friends, he became depressed. Perhaps then he began to understand that he was not like “real” writers. He stated that what distinguished him from them was his fundamental and irremediable defect – his organic inability to work systematically on his writing⁵². *Nulla dies sine linea* – the Latin paremia has instructed enthusiasts of this profession for two millennia now.

It seems that Schulz was in fact unable to write in a constant, unchanging rhythm, which must become an essential skill for anyone who wants to become a writer⁵³. He had been frequently returning to this matter in his letters to his friends⁵⁴. He was under the illusion that maybe if he gave up teaching for journalism, he would learn such regularity⁵⁵.

Worse still, writing was “very hard work” for him⁵⁶, and in order to start doing it at all, countless preliminary conditions had to be met – such as the already mentioned free time, solitude, the presence of a close reasonable conversation partner, general life satisfaction, etc. This was usually impossible, so *Messiah* was never the thing Schulz could concentrate on⁵⁷.

All this gives quite a clear picture of his writing personality.

He was not, like most of the writers he knew, a “typewriter”, a machine that sometimes jammed, but then resumed literary production. Rather, he was like a delicate, exotic plant whose growth and functioning depended on many complex, subtle factors. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, that plant withers for no apparent reason.

7

This is why Schulz never became a man of letters, that is, someone for whom writing became a profession, even though after the publication of *The Cinnamon Shops* he wanted it very much.

A writer is a professional, a person who makes a living from writing. A professional treats the practiced ability to use words effectively as an obedient tool ready to use for any purpose. This allows them to freely write purely functional

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 136, 142.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 182–183.

⁵³ We can point to countless testimonies about the regularity of work of outstanding writers, work carried out every day and at strictly scheduled hours. I will mention here, for example, Gombrowicz, Miłosz, Singer and Hemingway.

⁵⁴ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 123, 143, 145, 182.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 172.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 149.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 90.

texts, such as reviews, columns, reports, and often also satires, translations, or advertising materials. Model examples of such literary writers in the interwar period were Julian Tuwim and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński. The latter was famously prolific, and his works covered a wide variety of subjects. In one of the photographs published in the press at that time, he poses, holding with his outstretched hand a column made of his books taller than himself. Writers are usually proficient in this sense or, when necessary, they can become so.

Schulz's extremely elitist type of writing, combined with his low productivity, gave him no chance to make a living, despite the considerable fame he gained immediately after his debut. The publication of *The Cinnamon Shops* was financed by his affluent brother, Izydor, who earned money in the oil industry. The small royalties from the copies of this and the next book sold could not have had a major impact on the author's financial situation.

Immediately after his debut, Schulz gained access to and interest of the best literary journals. He used this opportunity only to a limited extent⁵⁸. He managed to establish regular cooperation with "Wiadomości Literackie", where he published reviews of books by foreign writers recommended to him by the editors. Even though he performed this task well, he did not feel that good about it. Collaboration with the magazine ended at the beginning of 1938, which he accepted with visible relief: "I stopped writing reviews for 'Wiadomości' because it doesn't amuse me. On the contrary, it was always a major difficulty to overcome"⁵⁹ –he confided to Romana Halpern.

I have already mentioned that Schulz was considering leaving school to work as a journalist. However, one could doubt whether he would be capable of this type of work at all. He must have realized this himself since he ultimately decided not to take this risky step. It is really difficult to imagine this neurasthenic introvert running around Warsaw from morning to evening to deliver to newspaper editors articles about, for example, a tram derailling in Śródmieście or about purchase prices of agricultural products dropping again.

This writerly inflexibility would also make itself felt during the Soviet occupation of Lviv. Schulz turned out to be incapable of writing in accordance with the doctrine applicable to writers in the Soviet Union. His story about the shoemaker's son, sent to "Nowe Widnokręgi", whose editor's Marxist expectations he clearly tried to address, turned out to be formally unacceptable⁶⁰.

However, he achieved the craftsmanship and efficiency of a genuine professional in his other role – as a painter. It was this ability that allowed him and the family he cared for to survive in circumstances that offered him little chance of

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 69.

⁵⁹ Letter to Romana Halpern from mid-February 1938, in: B. Schulz, *Księga Listów*, p. 165.

⁶⁰ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 95–96.

survival. For “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, he made many propaganda illustrations for the holidays of the communist state⁶¹. Large-format portraits of party dignitaries he painted hung on the streets of Drohobych.

So as a visual artist he turned out to be incomparably more versatile and flexible than as a writer. While carrying out orders for the totalitarian government, he was able to almost completely annihilate his distinctive drawing style. When we look at his socialist realist drawings, it is really difficult to be sure, based only on the lines, that their author was the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*.

After Hitler’s invasion, Schulz used his painting skills, eagerly utilized and highly appreciated by the Nazis stationed in Drohobych, to obtain the status of a “needed Jew”, which protected him from deportation to an extermination camp⁶². Being Felix Landau’s “personal Jew”, he “bought” more time by making portraits or decorating child’s room with scenes from the Brothers Grimm fairy tales.

Kazimierz Hoffmann, a teacher from Drohobych and Schulz’s friend wrote to Jerzy Ficowski about Schulz’s justified, though ambiguous, pride in this respect: “Bruno seemed to be grateful for his talent. It seems that despite the criminal atmosphere in which he was creating at that time [...], his works were probably masterpieces. Bruno owed his life to them. He created, he was happy that they were satisfied with his work. The SS men enjoyed art. Bruno was as if in a trance”⁶³.

On November 19, 1942, at the corner of ul. Czackiego and ul. Mickiewicza in Drohobych, Gestapo officer Karl Günther shot the painter, not the author of stories.

8

Unlike typical writers, Schulz did not consider literature to be the most important of the arts. He wrote this about himself in his application to Lviv school board: “I am a painter by education and vocation, but, as it sometimes happens in the artistic evolution of visual artists, for some time I have been directed by an internal impulse and the need for expression, towards the path of literary trials and experiments”⁶⁴. It was two years after the publication of *The Cinnamon Shops*.

But it was thanks to literature that he achieved artistic plenitude. In his visual works, though he devoted incomparably more time and attention to them than

⁶¹ Ł. Chomycz, *Bruno Schulz podczas sowieckiej okupacji Drohobycza*, „Schulz/Forum” 10, 2017.

⁶² J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 98.

⁶³ Quoted after: J. Kandzior, op. cit., p. 225.

⁶⁴ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 236.

to literature, he never even came close to the greatness that emanates from each paragraph of his prose.

Over the course of his fifty-year life, he produced thousands of drawings, and this significant number stands in striking contrast to the little more than thirty published stories. His development as a visual artist (it is worth remembering that he was basically self-taught) reached its peak quite quickly. Years of relative stagnation or regression followed. It is thought-provoking that Schulz's greatest graphic achievement was *The Booke of Idolatry*, created at the very beginning of the 1920s.

Let us declare a simple truth – he was not an outstanding painter. The world of his drawings is flat and monotonous, not only when we compare it with his literary worlds. In more extensive contact, the themes he explored seem borin-gly narrow, which is a consequence of the fixation on basically one motif – the domination of physically magnificent women and the physical awkwardness of the men who prostrate themselves before them.

In these drawings (rather than in literature), he implements the belief expressed in a letter to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz – that an artist throughout his life revolves around several fundamental images given to him at the beginning of his life, which constitute his “spiritual capital”. However, unlike in prose, Schulz did not manage to “break away from them [...] in the entire content that we acquire, carry them through the entire span of the intellect”⁶⁵. His drawings offer little new material; they remain monochromatic – not only in the visual sense of the word.

Schulz's writing is a dazzling feat of his imagination, working together with the intellect, which synthesizes previously non-existent “chemical compounds” from simple elements of our reality, thus making our world even richer. Thus, something emerged that was never made in the act of God's creation of the world, but should have been.

Nothing similar can be said about his drawings. In this respect, they are simply sterile, and at the same time they remain secondary to Goya's famous graphic cycles.

The mediocrity of Schulz's drawings, in terms of the presence of creative imagination in them, becomes particularly visible when we compare them with the drawings of Alfred Kubin, who is indeed often mentioned in contextual analyses⁶⁶. Kubin managed to achieve in drawings what seems Schulz's greatest achievement in prose – he created a previously non-existent reality, whose visual suggestiveness cannot be forgotten.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 106.

⁶⁶ K. Lipowski, *Demiurg jest dwoistością. Alfred Kubin i Bruno Schulz – próba porównania*, “Schulz/Forum” 2, 2013.

It is no coincidence that Schulz did not gain significant recognition as a painter during his lifetime, even if he consistently strived for it. Although his successes in this field were substantial (about ten exhibitions, which were predominantly organised in provincial towns, and some collective exhibitions in Lviv, Vilnius and Warsaw⁶⁷), they did not make him an important artist in the country. In this respect, the failure of his trip to Paris, where he arrived in August 1938, taking with him about a hundred drawings with the hope of exhibiting them, was quite bitter. Despite the contacts he established with the help of his friends, ultimately nothing came of it. This could only partly be put down to the city's holiday rush.

Thus, his achievements as a visual artist, just like his literary ones, were, in his opinion, affected by a major flaw of incompleteness. In one of the moments of utter crisis of faith in what he had been doing all his life, he wrote to Romana Halpern: "I lost my spirit completely. I told myself that I was neither a painter, nor a writer, nor even a decent teacher. It seems to me that I have deceived the world with some brilliance, that there is nothing in me"⁶⁸.

9

Even if we admit that he did not manage to become a painter, writer, or even a teacher (at least to the extent he wanted), one thing can certainly be said about him without hesitation – he was an artist *par excellence*. He was an artist regardless of what he wrote and painted. Art was the very core of his existence, as synonymous to his personal identity as possible. You cannot become this kind of artist. You are one or you are not.

This kind of artistry, which is "so deep, so primordial and elemental, that no yearning seems to it sweeter and more worthy of tasting than that for the raptures of common-placeness"⁶⁹ is the subject matter of Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*. Its main character is a writer marked by an artistic vocation from his earliest childhood. This makes his existence unlike any other, painfully removing him from the community of the so-called normal people. For the world, he is a freak, immersed, like an insect in amber, in foreign influences to an average person in matters of art. But Tonio, living his everyday life solely of art, is at the same time hungry for contact with the banal, and considers his separation from it as

⁶⁷ See on this topic: U. Makowska, *Dziwna awersja. O wystawach Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 13, 2019.

⁶⁸ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 140–141.

⁶⁹ T. Mann, "Tonio Kröger". *German Classics of The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Masterpieces of German Literature Translated into English*, Vol. 19, edited by K. Francke and W. G. Howard, translated by Bayard Quincy Morgan, Project Gutenberg, p. 414. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/30941>

a kind of disability. Meanwhile, his circle of friends consists of “demons, kobolds, heavy monsters” just like him⁷⁰.

It is probably no coincidence that Schulz, writing to Romana Halpern about his confinement in his own world, from which only Józefina Szelińska brought him out, almost exactly repeated the self-diagnosis presented by Tonio Kröger, using a characteristic word that is worth paying attention to: “She, my fiancée, is my share in life, through her I am a human being, not just a lemur and a kobold. She redeemed me with her love, almost lost and lost to inhuman lands, barren Hades of fantasy”⁷¹.

Schulz was, as I have mentioned, an admirer of Thomas Mann, and would be unusual if he had not read one of the most famous of Mann’s stories, in which he could find a portrait of his artistic double.

“Kobold” (a grotesque gnome from Germanic mythology) is a term for his status as outsider – which was probably a recurring motif in the correspondence of Schulz and Szelińska, since that is what she called him in a letter to Ficowski⁷². According to her, he was a kobold because: “nothing human was close to him [...] the only reality for him was the sphere of his creativity, [...] the artist absorbed the man [...], there was no *hiatus* between the man and the artist [...]”⁷³.

We must now mention here one extraordinary similarity between Schulz and the protagonist of Mann’s story in the context of Tonio’s “criminal” adventure. Kröger, after many years of absence from his hometown (which is, of course, Lübeck), stays in one of his hotels during his trip to Denmark. A very symptomatic incident occurs here – a local policeman mistakes him for a fraudster wanted on an arrest warrant. A rather unpleasant interrogation finally clarifies the case, but Tonio is not surprised that he was mistaken for a criminal by a vigilant officer. In Tonio’s opinion, the artist – like the criminal – is also a social outcast, and his “bourgeois conscience forces him [...] to see in all art [...] something deeply ambiguous, suspicious, and dubious [...]”⁷⁴.

When Schulz’s friend Regina Silberner flew with her husband from Havana to Miami in 1942, the FBI interrogated them for several hours. All their considerable luggage was thoroughly searched. Of the numerous photographs in the albums, only one aroused suspicion – that of Bruno Schulz. The FBI officers, with some incomprehensible insistence, demanded detailed explanations of the name of the man on it, who he was and where he was currently staying. It took a really long time. They were finally allowed to enter the US, but all their papers

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 49.

⁷¹ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 124.

⁷² Quoted after: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 194.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ T. Mann, op. cit., p. 57–59, 71.

were seized for further examination. When they finally came back to them after some time, there was only one thing missing – the photo of Bruno Schulz. It is probably still in police archives to this day – among photographs of individuals posing a threat to state security⁷⁵.

Szelińska wrote that Schulz's life was completely subordinated to art, but it would be more accurate to say something similar about him as has already been said here about his language – his life was an art. Therefore, we should understand his dedication to art in a broader sense than just as a complete dedication to writing or painting. Pure art was Schulz's unique way of everyday existence, as well as what constituted the content of the full richness of his inner life, which was his life proper. Writing or painting was merely their material and partial manifestation.

It was not because of contact with Schulz's stories or drawings, but with Schulz himself, that Debora Vogel was able to confess to him in a letter that “our past conversations and our contact were one of those few wonderful things that happen once in a lifetime, or maybe even once every few or a dozen hopeless, colourless lives”⁷⁶. Józefina Szelińska repeated the same with different words: “These sessions at my place [...] – and then our walks to the meadows [...] gave me a taste of wonder, unique experiences that are so rare in life. It was pure poetry [...] for Bruno, a young birch forest, a form of some touching clumsiness, served as a topic for reflection and collection of images in order to reach, as it were, the depth of the phenomenon”⁷⁷.

To be a poet to these women, he did not have to write even a single line.

⁷⁵ R. Silberner, op. cit., p. 23–24.

⁷⁶ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 265.

⁷⁷ J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 325.

Michał Paweł Markowski: Schulz – Writer as Philosopher

There are six popular superstitions regarding the distinction between literature and philosophy. Firstly, philosophy is said to be concerned with truth, while literature deals with fabrication. Secondly, it is believed that philosophy uses language in an imperceptible way, while literature consciously shows language. Thirdly, philosophy is assigned a “realistic” position in the sense that it refers to what is, while literature freely imagines various impossible things. Fourthly, philosophy is required to be serious, while literature is allowed to use irony, humour, and jokes. Fifthly, philosophy should base its considerations on reason, which proceeds methodically and without doubt, while literature is allowed to rely on intuition, which does not have to prove anything. Sixthly, it is assumed that philosophy tells us directly how things are, while literature tells various stories.

Fiction, metaphor, imagination, humour, intuition, and narrative are the domains of literature, while truth, linguistic economy, realism, seriousness, reason, and interpretation are the domains of philosophy. Is this a judgemental view? Of course, and it is so in both directions. Someone who is extremely serious and methodical will hold literature in contempt because its frivolity might weaken the authority of reason, without which – serious minds are so very afraid! – the world would easily fall apart. In turn, someone with a sense of humour or great emotional sensitivity will treat philosophy as a pathetic limitation to their unfettered imagination. Quite naturally, what is grounded in private beliefs, has its institutional counterparts. In philosophy departments, literature rarely appears, only as an object of philosophical study; analogically, in literature departments, philosophy is tolerated only as a necessary supplement. This division proves that between literature and philosophy there is a gap that should not be crossed because, as supporters of clear divisions say, it could cause the destruction of the foundations on which the entire cultural architecture is built. For the complicated mechanism of culture to function properly, literature should not overlap with philosophy, just as reason should not obscure intuition, seriousness should not be confused with humour, and man with a woman. Culture is based on stereotypes, because stereotype facilitates cognition, and cognition has an economic basis – it does not tolerate waste and to produce the final product (knowledge), it uses the cheapest means, i.e. cognitive ready-made materials, thanks to which it quickly categorizes reality.

However, sometimes such methods fail. Let us read the following fragment: “This is the phenomenon of imagination and vicarious being. An event may be small and insignificant in its origin, and yet, when drawn close to one’s eye, it may open in its center an infinite and radiant perspective because a higher order of being is trying to express itself in it and irradiates it violently”. If you agree to all the criteria listed above defining the difference between philosophy and literature, it will become clear that the above piece is not literary fiction. It would seem to be a serious lecture, rationally justified, written in a rather transparent language, containing philosophical concepts; a lecture in which the author sketches for us his own philosophy of the event, full intellectual evaluation of which would require a good knowledge of philosophical tradition, from Plato to Deleuze, taking into account the theological nuance.

But this quote comes from Bruno Schulz’s story “The Book”, undoubtedly a literary text. The reader is somewhat perplexed because, on the one hand, they believe that this fragment, according to almost universal criteria, is philosophical, but on the other hand it was written by a writer who, in other parts of the same text, meets all the criteria for the literary use of language. Having shaken off this embarrassment a bit, the reader will say that the writer has the right to philosophize from time to time, to put philosophical speculations into the mouth of a character or his narrator, but in the end, we still remain on the grounds of literature. Because Schulz is a writer who, indeed, manifests philosophical inclinations, but is primarily a master of imagination and language – which makes him a master of literary fiction. But a reader might as well shake off that confusion to think differently and say that literature is just an unnecessary form through which the writer tries to tell us extraordinarily serious things, written in a perfectly serious manner but also making a strong claim to truthfulness. This same reader could claim further that the real Schulz is right here, in this fragment about representation, that here he expounds his most important views, that without understanding this particular piece, we have no reason to delude ourselves that we can understand Schulz.

This is what it usually looks like: either the philosophical content is subordinated to the literary form, or the literary form is subordinated to philosophical content. In the first case, various philosophical traditions are attributed to Schulz, let us say: from Plato to Nietzsche, but these traditions are secondary to his literary genius.

In the second case, Schulz’s entire work comes down to a bundle of several discursive theses, easily omitting the trivial form. It is a situation of permanent imbalance, asymmetry, and incommensurability. Either philosophy or literature. Either Schulz the writer, who sometimes betrayed literature in favour of philosophy, or Schulz the philosopher or theologian, who treated literature only as a short suit that could not fit an overgrown kid.

I will provide just one example to illustrate. In his latest book, *Between Fire and Sleep: Essays on Modern Polish Poetry and Prose*, in a chapter devoted to Schulz, Jarosław Anders writes: “It is true that he seems to postulate a unity of matter and spirit, a life force permeating even inanimate objects but his visions develop as a series of unconnected impressionistic images that never cohere into a larger pattern suggestive of a deeper metaphysical order. His baroque metaphors, his brilliant and innovative linguistic clusters certainly ‘renew’ the world, but they do not discover anything about its nature, origin, or destiny. It is more likely that the search for a ‘primeval myth’ is for Schulz merely an alibi for a free play of imagination. His real goal is not the philosophical or religious probing of life’s depths, but the experience of life in an intensely sensual and radiantly aesthetic way”¹.

With claims like these, Anders disappoints the reader very much. In such a view, Schulz is a trivial aesthete whose work is only an incoherent collection of images and fancy metaphors, and therefore metaphysical problems, such as the investigation of the “essence of reality”, must be uninteresting to him. This reasoning is based on the belief that only in transparent, coherent, and linguistically neutral prose is a writer able to face the most serious subject matters. A truly profound writer, Anders suggests, effectively replaces words with things, leaving no unnecessary metaphorical residue that would distance both the writer and the reader from the “essence of reality” and would lock it in the “free play of imagination”. Schulz could be taken seriously, says Anders, but only if his drawings were less chaotic and if they could be parts of a coherent pattern. The fact that Anders is unable to notice such a pattern is not surprising, because someone who thinks that “experiencing life in an intensely sensual and radiantly aesthetic way” and the vivid imagery of language have little to do with asking serious questions should not, in my opinion, deal with literature at all.

What if we tried differently and did not ask who Schulz read, who influenced him and whether, for example, Romana Halpern managed to borrow Husserl from the library for him and what the reading of, say, *Logical Investigations* might have meant for his literature. What if we did not take into account the division between philosophy and literature and read Schulz as if he were not worse than any philosopher (because only worse philosophers get inspiration from better philosophers), but as if he himself had something important to tell us – something that we would entrust to philosophers because they are so serious and use such difficult words. What if we read Schulz on his own terms, according to his own thought – what if we agreed that a writer can also use the words “being”

¹ J. Anders, *Between Fire and Sleep: Essays on Modern Polish Poetry and Prose*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2009, p. 20.

and “representation” meaningfully, and that literature is not just a gripping story or a clever arrangement of words, which we look at in silent admiration, but is thinking about the world, which, although not directly stated, is no less related to this world than much more serious discourses – what if we assumed that one could seriously discuss the world with the writer? His world, Schulz’s, and ours.

Well, this may surprise the reader, but I believe that no one has taken Schulz very seriously so far. In my opinion, no one has yet read Schulz philosophically, that is, has not read him as he deserves; no one recognized that Schulz had something very important to tell us about the world, about ourselves, about how reality is built, what sense it all makes and how we are supposed to be involved in all this. That is because no one recognizes Schulz’s intellectual ingenuity, while everyone eagerly searches for the sources of his thoughts, because a writer becomes a greater writer when he is assigned some philosophical contexts. And so they search in the Jewish kabala, in Nietzsche, in Romanticism, in Schopenhauer, in Bergson, in Leibniz, show affinities with Jung, with Cassirer, as if this revealing of affinities could tell us anything about Schulz, as if the creation of such links proved his originality. To put it bluntly: any work that searches for some philosophical themes in Schulz’s work, contrary to intentions, adds no value at all to Schulz, but it radically impoverishes, belittles, infantilises and assaults him. To say that Schulz uses in his work some threads from some great philosopher, Nietzsche or Bergson, is to say that he could only afford to take them on loan, to engage in petty smuggling, or in clandestine transplants.

Of course, I am asking a basic question here. Is there a philosophy of Bruno Schulz? Is there a separate, original philosophy bearing only his name? And if that were the case, what would it mean? What does Schulz tell us that is important? Where does his greatness really lie?

It is said that Poland in the interwar period brought into the world two interesting schools of philosophy. The first was the Lviv-Warsaw school, with Twardowski, Ajdukiewicz, Leśniewski, but above all with Alfred Tarski. The second one is, of course, the phenomenological school, though here only Husserl’s student, Roman Ingarden, comes to mind. Yes, the schools are strong, with great names, but if we look at their influence today (apart from Tarski, the best thinker of the bunch), it seems no one in the world reads them anymore, no one is inspired, no one comments. So maybe instead of uncritically boasting that we have such a wonderful philosophical past, we should ask why this relative lack of interest in it is really the case?

One answer is that eighty years ago both Polish schools shone with light reflected from their fires, and when these fires dimmed (like that of analytic philosophy) or almost died out (like phenomenology), the names of their representatives have faded into oblivion. Today, both analytical philosophy and phenomenology are present only in narrow professional circles, and in fact no

one, except a few specialists, wants to know what is going on in them. There's a million dollars for anyone who mentions an interesting, brilliantly conceived book that has been published anywhere in the world, or even in Poland, about Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz or Roman Ingarden.

But there is another answer, which seems much more interesting to me. Why is it that no one comments on Polish interwar philosophy today? The answer is this: because the most interesting things at that time were said not by philosophers, but by writers. Let us take the example of Witkacy, who unnecessarily insisted that his philosophical system was worth nothing, unnecessarily wasted energy on unending, one-way discussions with Carnap, Husserl or Wittgenstein (let us thus at least acknowledge his great ambitions) and tormented his wife by endlessly rewriting, as he used to say, his "main thing". Witkacy is an excellent thinker, though not where his excellence is usually sought. Instead of worrying about his formulated philosophy, which, to be honest, is dramatically graphomaniacal and derivative, one must carefully observe how he develops relationships between characters on stage and in his novels, how phenomenally he analyses human motivations, inhibitions and hesitations, and how thoroughly he shows the drama of an exceptionally intelligent consciousness. We should see how brilliantly he shows the powerlessness of language in the face of reality, and at the same time how this language detaches itself from things and drifts on its own, in the human gibberish that is the answer to the chaos of the world. When Witkacy argued with Tarski by drawing a giant tongue next to the word "metalanguage", it was indeed funny, but never for a moment was he as brilliant as when, side by side with Heidegger, but without knowing his analyses, he showed the mechanics of human "talk", *die Gerede*, as the author of *Sein und Zeit* called it. When one writes about Witkacy's philosophy, the choppy pieces about monadology and Individual Existence immediately come to mind, but no one will think about the fact that philosophy is not a technical discourse, understandable only to the initiated, but a precise analysis of what is happening in the world, in in our heads, in our words, in our relationships. The fact that today it is worth reading Witkiewicz rather than Twardowski, and Gombrowicz rather than Ajdukiewicz, is proof that the literature written in interwar Poland by a few fancy lunatics is significantly more important today than philosophy, which was dealt with by several serious professors in lab coats. It is more important, because it is alive, "unlecturable", unobvious and exceeds any expectations whatsoever. Bruno Schulz may have exaggerated a bit when he wrote to his friend that as a "spiritual act", *Ferdydurke* should be placed next to Freud and Proust, but if we look at the matter more closely, he was certainly right. Gombrowicz did more for Polish literature than Proust did for French culture or Freud did for the German one. Gombrowicz showed something that Żeromski, Reymont and Staff's Poland could not afford, namely, as Schulz called it, that the "cloaca of culture" is much more important than its facade, that "disgrace and shame" say more about a man than

his sublime declarations and that “life is great without higher sanctions”. Polish culture was only poorly prepared for such a spiritual act, so it is not surprising that, as Gombrowicz later described it in *Dziennik*, all three of them: himself, Witkacy and Schulz “wandered around Polish literature like a twirl, an ornament, a chimera, a griffin”. Neither rhyme nor reason. Neither fish nor fowl. Neither use nor ornament. It is the “neither nor”, that lack of clear assignment, that makes them extraordinary writers. But, as I say, not only writers.

In June 1939, Bruno Schulz, terribly tormented by “despair, sadness, the feeling of inevitable defeat, irreparable loss”, wrote to Romana Halpern: “I am afraid of contacts and people. I would prefer to remove myself in the company of just one other person into quiet retreat and set out, like Proust, to embark on the final formulation of my world”. I leave aside the sense of defeat that consumed Schulz completely in the second half of the 1930s, bordering with depression and a sense of abandonment. I am interested in this comparison with Proust, but not as a sign of megalomania, but, contrarily, as a sign of belief that the writer’s task is to formulate his own world. At the same time, Schulz adds that he would now like to begin the “final formulation” of his world, which means that his work to date, that is, in fact, almost everything we know, can be considered a non-final attempt at formulating this world.

From this point of view there is no difference between the philosopher and the writer – each of them in their own way, sometimes in different languages, formulates their own world, that is, tries to find a formula for their own world in which they would like to live, in accordance with the principles they would like to live by, whose meanings would constitute a whole. Beginning with Plato, philosophy does nothing else, and the difference between great and minor philosophers is that the former can impose such a formula on others, while the latter cannot free themselves from the formula imposed on them. Literature deals with the same thing, regardless of whether it speaks in prose or verse, whether it tells stories, or puts actors on stage. The difference between a first-rate and a second-rate writer is that the world of the former is more capacious than that of the latter and has more possible residents; it is also that the formula of this world is much more attractive, and it presents itself to us with greater ruthlessness.

Everything I have said so far leads to one simple thesis: that Bruno Schulz is one of the most important Polish philosophers, and at the same time one of the most important Polish writers. Not really because one can find traces of numerous philosophical readings in his texts, and not because it is possible to extract some philosophical thought from his works, but because the formula of his world, which he laboriously constructed over the years and which he did not finally formulate, is one of the most interesting formulas that were presented to us in Polish in the 20th century. What is this formula? I will try to recreate it in

the simplest way possible – at the risk of simplification, perhaps, but at the same time suggesting that without such a reconstruction it is difficult to understand Schulz's world. What I will present now is a formula of a formula, a reconstruction of Schulz's philosophy, a summary of the basic rules of his world, made for all the dauphins of the empire of literature.

Our lives tend to congeal into shapes whose durability belies life itself, because between the matter of life and the forms that this matter takes on, there is a radical asymmetry. While we need these shapes to deny the formless imminent chaos that terrifies us, we should never agree for these shapes to be in any way final. If there is such a thing as our nature, it does not know peace, but it puts on different masks, takes on countless characters and roles to find the best ground for itself, where it could settle down and find shelter. But it never manages to do so. Human life is permanently unfinished, because it always shows us its "eternal otherness" (a term Schulz used). All our possibilities will never be realized, which does not mean that we should limit them in advance. On the contrary, the more possibilities, the better life, because (I quote Schulz again) nothing is impossible for a willing soul. If reality is the realization of various potentials, then the more possibilities are actualized in the world, the richer reality is in senses, the more it means. And the richer the reality is, the greater effort it takes to read it. Human existence, which finds a justification for itself only in development is an interpreting existence. Interpretation is the extending of existence with new possibilities, because interpretation is not a way of getting to know the world, but of being in it.

Today, such an interpretation is not surprising. However, eighty years ago, such thinking was an extremely original and creative part of the most interesting line of philosophical thinking in Europe. There was both Hegel and Kierkegaard, there was Nietzsche and Heidegger, but Schulz did not copy any of these philosophers, did not imitate them, did not make them his precursors. He thought in his own way and wrote his thoughts into literary texts. Sometimes all of it is evident already on the surface, sometimes it demands more in-depth reading. In Poland at the time, nobody thought like this about the world, about man, about life, about interpretation, about experience – neither in Lviv, nor in Warsaw, nor in Zakopane. But no one used paronomasia, synecdoche, anaphora and apostrophe like Schulz, either. As long as Bruno Schulz wanders somewhere between literature and philosophy treated as separate discourses, his greatness will remain doomed to undeserved diminution. So what are we waiting for? We are waiting for a book about Bruno Schulz that will show us the philosophical meaning of his style.

Stefan Chwin: Why Bruno Schulz Did Not Want to Be a Jewish Writer: On the “Erasing” of Jewishness in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and *The Cinnamon Shops*

Almost all Schulz events and conferences in Drohobych have one key item in their program: a visit to the Drohobych synagogue. As if Schulz and the famous synagogue at 6 Pylypa Orlyka were one thing. Meanwhile, the complete absence of the Drohobych synagogue in Schulz’s texts and literary imagination is intriguing. This monumental building – the largest of its type in Central and Eastern Europe – did not enter the writer’s imagination even in the slightest way, even though during his lifetime it was – and still is – a very characteristic element of the city’s architectural landscape. It is hard to imagine the real Drohobych without the building with a triangular pediment rising above the roofs of the houses, and yet there is not even a word about it in Schulz’s works. As if the Drohobych synagogue did not exist for him at all. There is no space for other Drohobych synagogues in his writing, too: for example for the one built in Stryjska Street, on the corner, in the Vienna Secession style, and in general for any synagogue, also from outside Drohobych. Was it related to Schulz’s attitude towards the Jewish religion, and perhaps also towards all other religions? One can doubt¹.

¹ In this study, I do not intend to question the findings of researchers who have collected extensive evidence for how important the connections between Bruno Schulz’s prose and Jewish culture were. I also do not intend to investigate to what extent Schulz felt (or did not feel) a Jew, that is, a member of the Jewish community. I will only be interested in whether in the 1930s Schulz wanted the audience, critics and publishers to identify him as a Jewish writer. Therefore, this article is about Schulz’s self-presentation. For an instructive discussion of views on “Schulz as a Jewish writer” – see e.g. *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz. New Combinations, Further Fragmentations*, eds. D. de Bruyn and K. van Heuckelom, Amsterdam – New York, 2009.

Józefina Szelińska claimed that Schulz was very attached to the Jewish atmosphere of Drohobych, which in turn – as she wrote – irritated her greatly (RW 324)². According to Ficowski, Schulz’s family visited the “Drohobych prayer house” (RW 19), though it is unknown whether they did so regularly. Schulz himself liked to mingle with the crowd of Jews celebrating on Yom Kippur. He also started as a painter in a group of Jewish intelligentsia called “Kalleia”; in 1923, he exhibited his works in Vilnius as one of the Jewish artists; in 1930, he took part in a group exhibition at the Jewish Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts in Cracow – so he openly identified himself with his native environment (RW 490–491). It was no coincidence that he designed tombstones made of Trembovlia sandstone for his parents’ graves in the spirit of traditional iconography, which he knew well and which he controlled as an artist, even though, it is worth remembering, he placed Polish rather than Jewish inscriptions on the stone slabs (OS 19)³.

All this allows us to assume that as a graphic designer and painter he did not mind being considered a Jewish artist. Admittedly, Ficowski firmly stated that Schulz did not know “even the language of his fathers” and was not close to “centers of Jewish culture” (KL 169)⁴, but even if he, as a non-religious person, had not visited the synagogue at all, there was nothing to stop him from mentioning the existence of the Drohobych temple in one of his texts, even if only in a few words, not even as a sacred building related to the Jewish religion, but simply as one of the famous buildings of his hometown. His religious beliefs or lack thereof did not have to be the cause of consistent “overlooking” of this building in stories.

Schulz’s attention was focused on several important architectural points of Drohobych, but – significantly – there was no Jewish temple among them. Interestingly, it is not a synagogue, but a Gothic cathedral⁵ that dwelt with great

2 See J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002 (hereinafter: RW; translated into English as idem, *Regions of the Great Heresy. Bruno Schulz: A Biographical Portrait*, trans. Theodosia Robertson, New York: W. W. Norton, 2003). Schulz was circumcised as a child, and automatically entered into the Jewish community. According to the birth certificate, his name was Bruno, but according to Ficowski, his original name was “Ber”, which was a reference to the name “Berl” or “Berish”, the Jewish name of his maternal grandfather. In the family, Schulz was called “Brunio”. His sister’s name was Hania. His brother’s Isidor’s ceremonial Jewish name was Izrael Baruch. Even though their mother’s name was Hendel, the sign of the Schulz family store in Mickiewicza Street in Drohobych included the name Henrietta, which was not strange at that time, because adding non-Jewish names to Jewish ones was then considered normal.

3 See J. Ficowski, *Okolice sklepów cynamonowych*, Kraków 1986 (hereinafter as: OS).

4 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, Gdańsk 2002 (hereinafter as: KL).

5 Bogusław Marszał recalled that in 1938, after returning from Paris, Schulz evocatively talked “about the dazzlingly beautiful medieval stained glass windows of French temples and showed their colorful reproductions” (OS 18). As we can guess, those were probably French Gothic cathedrals. In “The Gale”, the spatial model of the sky is a combination of cathedral vaults, arcades, and a “multiple labyrinth” – (B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, edited by J. Jarzębski, Wrocław 1989, p. 96 further: O), galleries of rooms, long enfilades and casemates (O 87). Schulz

force in his imagination. In numerous metaphorical images that built the vision of the world in Schulz's stories, the characteristic shape of the cathedral appeared next to references to monastic architecture, Spanish palace, baroque, Art Nouveau and colonial architecture, and on even next to such exotic forms of Asian architecture as pagodas and minarets (O 164)⁶.

What was more important for Schulz the writer than the synagogue was rosettes, stained glass windows, escorial windows, courtyards, dormitories, as we can see, for example, in the story "The Republic of Dreams", in which nature suggests for man shapes to imitate, but – it is worth noting – there are no synagogue-related shapes, or forms characteristic of Jewish culture such as the shape of a menorah, a matzevah or a Torah scroll, but what appears is forms far from the spirit and style of Jewish architecture and art, related to the symbolic sphere of the European Christian or courtly civilization – refectories, gazebos, park belvederes, and even entire renditions of Versailles. It was the Gothic cathedral – which does not exist and never existed in Drohobych – which largely obscured the outline of the synagogue structure and spatial matrix in Schulz's world.

In "The Republic of Dreams", personified Nature tells the man which forms he should imitate; it has Christian-Greek, cathedral-classical and baroque-gothic imagination; it was her whispers that Schulz's narrator wants to listen to. Also the Underworld in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* did not resemble the Jewish Sheol – in metaphorical passages it appeared as the Greco-Roman space of asphodel with the guarding dog Cerberus (O 272) or the symbolic space of the Greek Elysium (O 332)⁷.

And if Schulz built metaphorical images of the sky in his prose, he often did it according to the Gothic matrix of the cathedral interior – rather than that of a synagogue, even though, in the interwar period, the vault of the Drohobych Choral Synagogue, which – as one can assume – he saw with his own eyes, painted blue and illuminated by crystal chandeliers, was a symbolic image of the sky.

Were all these omissions and "oversights" a consequence of Schulz's distance from Judaism and the gravitation of his religious and ethical sensitivity towards Catholicism? Not necessarily.

also created an image of the night resembling a gigantic organ (O 89). In "The Age of Genius" the sky was compared to military buildings (battlements, fortalices, O 122). In "Spring" it had an enfilade structure (O 200). In "The Cinnamon Shops", the spatial model of the sky was made up of "multiple vaults" (O 69), a map, a dome and an astrolabe.

⁶ In "Spring", the image of the sky was based on Chinese and Arabic associations (pagodas and cloud minarets, O 164). However, Schulz never uses the image of clouds forming the shape of a synagogue, menorah or Torah scroll.

⁷ Characteristically, in a letter to Romana Halpern of September 19, 1936, Schulz described his spiritual life using an ancient Greek spatial metaphor, not a Judaic one – as "the barren Hades of fantasy" (KL 81).

We know, however, that in the Drohobych Junior High School of King Władysław Jagiełło, Bruno Schulz, a teacher, crossed himself in the Catholic way at morning prayer with his students, and he personally led his class to Easter confession, and in church he behaved like any other Catholic. We know from Schulz's niece, Ella Schulz-Podstolska, that he was genuinely fascinated by Jesus, and that he had his own copy of the New Testament. However, Ficowski strongly rejected Andrzej Chciuk's claims that Schulz was a believing Catholic and was baptized before World War I (OS 50). On February 8, 1936, Schulz himself abandoned Judaism for his fiancée, who was a Catholic, and after leaving the Jewish community in Drohobych, he obtained the status of a non-believer (RW 498). In a letter to Romana Halpern of September 19, 1936, he wrote that even though he was interested in Christian philosophy, he did not want to accept Catholic baptism (KL 81). According to Ficowski, in a letter of May 1938, Witold Gombrowicz encouraged Schulz to visit the famous facility for the blind in Laski, managed by priest Władysław Kornilowicz, arguing that Schulz's spirituality naturally gravitates towards Christianity. In another letter addressed to Schulz, an unknown woman expressed the belief that Schulz would "end up" in Catholicism anyway, but he himself never suggested that he would like to connect his future with it. His friends considered him a "general" believer (OS 53–54), and therefore neither a follower of Judaism nor Catholicism.

Only in one place did Schulz define himself more clearly, putting his soul against the "tawny, Slavic soul" of Zenon Waśniewski. But even here, we are not sure whether he contrasted his own soul – as a "meandering and dark" Jewish one – with the Polish soul that is completely different in racial terms; or maybe he just juxtaposed his own depressive personality with the cheerful, bright soul of a former school friend (KL 37).

The way Schulz referred to signs of Jewishness in his drawings is also characteristic: he created a separate domain for Jews, consistently separating it from the rest of his works. In his illustrations to *The Age of Genius*, he depicted the men of the Sanhedrin in their Jewish costumes, and also portrayed ritual feasting at the Passover table⁸, which Chmurzyński connected with the first version of "Spring" written in 1935, and the rest of the "Jewish" drawings Schulz made for the lost novel *Messiah*. Chmurzyński concluded that the writer's graphic portfolio included "15 items" of Judaic nature⁹. He emphasized that in those works Schulz

⁸ But he did not depict the great Drohobych synagogue in any of the drawings I know of. In the cityscape, he willingly placed geometric shapes of anonymous residential houses, as well as the building of the town hall in Drohobych with its characteristic tower, while consistently "overlooking" the shape of the Jewish temple in his images of the city.

⁹ *Bruno Schulz 1892–1942. Katalog–pamiętnik wystawy "Bruno Schulz. Ad memoriam" w Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza w Warszawie*, red. W. Chmurzyński, Warszawa 1995, p. 15 (hereinafter: AM).

consistently avoided showing his face, perhaps except for his oil painting titled “The Meeting”, in which he might have portrayed himself in a black Hasidic costume. But it is hard to be absolutely certain that the figure of a Hasidic man depicted in the painting looking at two elegant women is actually Schulz’s self-portrait, even though it is quite commonly considered to be so in the Schulz legend¹⁰. It should rather be assumed, instead, that Schulz never included his own image in drawings with clearly Jewish themes. Many other works prove that he liked to portray himself, though. Also, he scarcely used any clear Judaic motifs in his erotic-masochistic drawings. He clearly removed all traces of Jewishness in *The Booke of Idolatry*. He acted here with absolute consistency¹¹. The same rule applied to self-portraits. In them, he avoided props with Jewish connotations to the same extent as in *The Booke of Idolatry*, which, as we can assume, he treated as his export article. It is significant that Witkacy did not see even a hint of Jewishness in Schulz’s drawings, placing his visions close to Goya’s, and not in the context of the biblical iconography of the Hasidic world, which makes us suspect that Schulz simply did not show him anything other than *The Booke of Idolatry* itself (KL 163–164)¹².

Things were different in prose.

A puzzling incident from Schulz’s artistic biography is worth mentioning here. When in 1935 Schulz published the first version of “Spring” in “Kamen” (no. 10/20)¹³, he clearly defined “Easter” as “the great theater of Passover”, “the ancient mystery period of the Egyptian spring”, he also mentioned the “Passover night” and the “plagues of Egypt”¹⁴. He “erased” all these terms from the final version of the short story, which was written in early 1936. The whole – as Ficowski called it – “Paschal aura, Judaic-Biblical props” (OS 67) were not included either

10 See J. Ficowski, *Autoportrety i portrety Brunona Schulza*, “NaGłos” 1992, no 7.

11 There was perhaps one exception: on one of the covers of *The Booke of Idolatry*, Schulz presented an unfurled Torah scroll and the face of the bearded patriarch with raised hands, but he avoided such depictions in the collection of prints. It is characteristic that the Torah scroll on the cover did not have any Hebrew characters on the parchment. It was “pure”, devoid of any inscriptions.

12 Schulz developed the same motif in two versions. Its Hasidic version was prepared, as one might assume, for private use, and a version cleared of Jewish connotations was addressed to a wider audience. For example, in “The Meeting” he depicted two Hasidic boys looking at a naked woman. A similar arrangement of figures appeared in the illustrations to “Spring”, depicting Rudolph and Joseph looking at Bianca, but this particular depiction of the same subject has been “cleansed” of more visible Jewish details. This is how Wojciech Chmurzyński wrote about the oil painting entitled “The Meeting”: “Never before or since has Schulz portrayed himself in Hasidic clothing. His costumed self-image in the painting is therefore an absolute rarity in his work” – Chmurzyński, “Spotkanie ze *Spotkaniem*, czyli kilka uwag o obrazie olejnym Brunona Schulza”, [in:] *Katalog-pamiętnik wystawy “Bruno Schulz. Ad memoriam”*, p. 214.

13 He sent it to the editor on March 16, 1935 (OS 66).

14 See R. Kaśków, *Wielki Teatr Paschy. O akcentach żydowskich w twórczości Brunona Schulza*, „NaGłos” 1997, nr 7.

in the version published in “Skamander” (1936, no. 74, 75) or in the version that appeared in the book edition, probably because – according to Ficowski – it would create too clear an image of Easter as a Jewish holiday (KL 160). It can be assumed that Schulz either did not want such an image to appear in his works, or he simply agreed on the interference of the publishers who removed this fragment from the final text of “Spring”, and in his letters we will not find any evidence that he protested against this possible editorial interference in any way in. When Mieczysław Grydzewski printed his debut novella *Birds* and signed it “Bronisław Schulz” (KL 167) – changing the name Bruno to a name that sounded much more “Slavic” – no evidence remained to suggest that Schulz complained to the editor, even though in his letters he strongly protested against what Edda van Haardt did with one of his texts, significantly changing the form and content of the original.

There was also the issue of anthroponymy and toponymy, i.e. characteristic naming strategy Schulz the prose writer used in his texts. This strategy relied largely on “erasing” from his stories names and surnames with clearer Jewish connotations. If in his letters Schulz often mentioned such Drohobych surnames as Sternbach, Płockier, Zwillich, Vogel, Halpern, Pilpel, Wingarten, Chajes, then he clearly avoided such names in stories¹⁵. Analogically, first names such as Rachel, Deborah, Esther, and Sarah were not allowed to enter his prose, and the maid with her beautiful name Ruchla was turned into a hundred times more banal Adela. We will find no David, Abraham, or Isaac among his characters. In the restaurant in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, the waiter is named Adam (O 263) and is compared to the Greek Ganymede. In “Spring”, Bianka mentions Lonka, Antosia’s daughter (O 200). In “August”, the hero’s aunt is named Agatha, his uncle’s name is Mark, his aunt’s daughter’s is Lucy, and his cousin’s is Emil. In “The Dead Season”, the shop assistant’s name is Leon (O 239), and another one’s name is Theodore (O 246). In “Father’s Last Escape”, the servant’s name is Genya, and the uncle’s name is Charles (O 316). In “Solitude” appears Aunt Thecla (O 310), in “Pensioner” Mr. Filer (O 294) and Kathy (O 297), as well as the students Wicky and Simon (O 309).

It is enough to compare this with the panorama of names and surnames, for example from Julian Strykowski’s *The Inn* to realize how consistently Schulz “erased” Jewish connotations from his literary world. In Strykowski there are Gerson, Bum, Kramer, Tojwie, Szalomcia, Apfelgrun... Schulz’s real cousin Dawid Heimberg turns into “Dodo” in one of the stories and his relatives are cousin Caroline, aunt Retitia and uncle Jerome styled, which can hardly be considered

15 In a letter of March 3, 1938 to Romana Halpern the name “Spiegel” was mentioned; in a letter from March 10 it was “Reitman”; in a letter of June 12 – Menasze Seidenbeutel, and in a letter of October 13 – Zygfryd Bienstock. In “The Dead Season”, the name of merchants with Jewish connotations appeared in the name of the company “Christian Seipel and sons” (O 235), but this was a unique situation in Schulz’s prose.

a coincidence, as a Catholic Saint Jerome (O 281). Touya from “August” actually existed as Tłoja, but in the story her mother appears as the completely Slavic Maryśka (O 9). The only Jewish name – apart from Jacob and Noah – in Schulz’s entire prose is Shloma, son of Tobias (O 128), who walks around Holy Trinity Square. Moreover, in Schulz’s stories, there is no Drohobych house with a mezzuzah, even though approximately 20,000 Polish citizens of Jewish origin lived in Drohobych in the 1930s. In a symbolic landscape of his stories one will not find a single matzevah or Jewish cemetery.

But why did Schulz do all this? Was this “erasure” and weakening of Jewishness in prose related to his fear of anti-Semitism, which was completely justified in the 1930s?¹⁶ In 1938, Schulz did not want to go to Paris through Germany. “It would depress me” – he wrote in a letter to Romana Halpern of May 28 (KL 108). To avoid Hitler’s country, he chose a much more expensive route through Italy, which was significant given his meagre income. In a letter to Romana Halpern of March 20 (KL 105), he described the Anschluss of Austria as “distressing historical events” (KL 105). He was then well aware of what was happening in Europe. He also sensed resentment from the editors of “Prosto z mostu”, about which he wrote openly (KL 110). In 1938, he was even afraid that he might simply be fired at the Drohobych school “if the currents troubling our country enter into law” (letter to Romana Halpern of March 31, 1938, KL 106). Toning down the Jewish quality of *The Cinnamon Shops* and its image of Drohobych would be completely understandable in such a context, because the reasons for concern were serious and Schulz did not ignore them.

However, other circumstances could also have been important. Schulz really wanted to win the prestigious “Wiadomości Literackie” award for *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, but in his letters he made it clear that thanks to this significant honour he could go – as he put it – “beyond the borders of the Polish language” (letter to Romana Halpern of February 20, 1938, KL 102), as if he treated his Polish writing and successes on the Polish literary scene primarily as a springboard enabling a much greater career. At that time, he was writing a novella in German and thinking about a letter to Thomas Mann, and the fact that his friends noticed the similarities of his prose to *The Stories of Jacob* really flattered him. He tried to ensure that the novella *Die Heimkehr* was sent to Zurich

16 See M. Nowicka, *Żyd, czarownica i stara szafa. O konstruowaniu żydowskości autorów piszących o “trudnej” przeszłości*, “Teksty Drugie” 2012, nr 4. In the case of Polish writers of Jewish origin in the 1930s, mainly two behavioral strategies came to play: either “publicising self-demonization” (p. 265), i.e. publicly emphasizing one’s Jewishness, considered beneficial in the sense of advertising, or stigmatizing demonization, i.e. degrading accusations of Jewishness. Schulz “did not brand” himself as a Jew, but others did, which he accepted with concern. See also: M. Szara-Szawabowicz, *Literatura polska w zwierciadle hebrajskojęzycznej krytyki literackiej*, “Teksty Drugie” 2012, no 1/2.

(KL 192). It all looked as if after his Polish success, he wanted to quickly change into a German-language writer. In his letter of November 4, 1936 to Mendel Neugroschl he expressed hope for a German translation of *The Cinnamon Shops* (KL 77). Writing to Romana Halpern on September 29, 1937, he mentioned that he had a great command of German and has already written something in German (KL 94). He also sought a career in Italy and France. In the light of these facts, the question arises whether this is why in the famous *Exposé* to *The Cinnamon Shops*, intended for an Italian publisher, there is no mention of the fact that he had written a mythical story about a Jewish family living in one of the cities of Central and Eastern Europe, but he carefully erased all traces of the specific cultural-geographical, Galician-Jewish atmosphere of his texts.

However, it would be wrong to assume that Schulz only wanted to “erase” and weaken Jewish elements. “Erasing” in his prose was not limited only to Jewishness. The “erasure” had a much broader scope.

Schulz is usually presented as a symbol of multiculturalism or an artistic effect of the multireligious and multinational culture of Eastern Galicia, and his work is associated with the concept of a cultural melting pot¹⁷. Meanwhile, in his prose, Schulz carried out a literary “ethnic cleansing” of Drohobych – that is, he “erased” or weakened all signs of the Polish-Jewish-Ukrainian local colour of the place and people. As a prose writer, he noticed no Ukrainian colours, characteristic of the moral and social atmosphere of his hometown, or the equally characteristic colours of the Carpathian highland culture, even though he not only wrote about Hutsul culture in a letter to Romana Halpern of March 10, 1938 (KL 101), but also – as witnesses said – he even took great pleasure in eloquently describing the Orthodox Russian look of the St. George’s Church to his students on school trips, referring to some terms taken from... the Hutsul culture¹⁸. However, he avoided such terms and cultural details in his prose. So he behaved a bit like a writer from interwar Gdańsk who pretended not to see

17 The opinion about the multiculturalism of Schulz’s prose in Drohobych is one of the strongest stereotypes regarding the reception of his works. “The combination of Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian sources” in Schulz’s work “is a hallmark of the dialogical essence of the Drohobych land.” Schulz’s work “has become a sign of the multicultural space of our city” – see W. Meniok, “Czynnik polsko-żydowski w genealogii kulturalnej Drohobycza”, [in:] *Drohobycz wielokulturowy*, ed. M. Dąbrowski and W. Meniok, Warszawa 2005, p. 60.

18 During school trips, Schulz apparently described St. George’s Church in Drohobych in the following way: “It feels like we can see our local country woman decked out in her sumptuous gown with its protruding ‘ribbons’, a woman who hugs her two daughters with both hands, also dressed in festive clothes, and she grandly follows them to Sunday mass” (OS 15). This is how he also talked about the church: “here is a highlander from the Carpathians with a ‘klobouk’ on his head, standing with his legs wide apart and arms akimbo and he feels good standing on his own land...” (OS 15). This type of phrase, encrusted with highlander vocabulary, does not appear anywhere in his prose.

Kashubians on the streets, or a writer from interwar Zakopane who supposedly failed to notice Podhale highlanders on Krupówki.

Neither the onion domes of the wooden St. George's Church, nor Exaltation of the Cross church, nor the type of imagery taken from Ukrainian-Carpathian folklore to which Schulz allegedly referred in his speech, describing the Drohobych Orthodox church to his students on trips, nor the figure of any Carpathian highlander, one of those whom he could certainly see on market days from the windows of his house at the Drohobych market square, made it into the language of his prose and the image of Drohobych created therein¹⁹. If in *The Dead Season* the character of a "village yokel" appeared, it did not matter whether he was a Pole, a Ruthenian, a Hutsul or a Ukrainian, because Schulz, the prose writer, was not interested in it at all (O 239).

The basic rule of Schulz's prose was to describe Drohobych, but not in the language of the place - especially not the language of the streets²⁰. Drohobych *bałak* jargon – a specific local dialect combining various influences and atmospheres – was not allowed to enter the language of *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. The linguistic signature of a multicultural city, the "local" atmosphere, *bałak* as music of Drohobych "little homeland", a sign of *the genius loci*, cannot be heard even remotely in the language of Schulz's prose.

The Orthodox, Ruthenian or Ukrainian color of Drohobych simply did not exist for Schulz the writer²¹. Likewise, no local Ukrainian sounds will be found in this narrative. Drohobych, as it was presented in *The Cinnamon Shops*, in terms of topographic, moral and architectural realities, appeared to be simply one of the Catholic Polish cities of the Second Polish Republic, with a pinch of Jewish atmosphere, beaming with a stylized aura of biblical references. Although there is no synagogue in Schulz's Drohobych, Catholic churches appeared several times in his works²², next to the Mickiewicz monument and the Basilian

19 Things were presented differently in his prose by, for example, Andrzej Chciuk, according to whom the Drohobych *bałak* (street dialect) influenced not only the language of Polish, but also Ukrainian and Jewish inhabitants of Drohobych. Chciuk emphasized that the speech of Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, Hungarians, Gypsies and even Slovaks resounded in the streets and houses of Drohobych. This Drohobych cosmos of languages did not interest Schulz at all. See A. Chciuk, *Atlantyda. Pierwsza opowieść o księstwie Bałaku*, Warsaw 1989.

20 At the same time, in a letter to Tadeusz Breza of May 21, 1934, Schulz made it clear that "The Cinnamon Shops" is a story about a completely real Drohobych from the times of his youth (KL 26).

21 There is one exception: in "My Father Joins the Fire Brigade" appeared a room of a famous Russian Orthodox charity organization "Staupigia" as the venue of the fire brigade banquet (O 223).

22 In "Dead Season" there was a "bell tower of the church" seen through "the bright quadrilateral of the doorway" (O 236). *Birds* mentioned a "church" (O 21). In "Gale", Schulz's narrator, looking over the roofs at the entire panorama of Drohobych – up to the "gable ends" of the suburb – mentioned a church at the Market Square (O 87).

Hill. Polish toponymy clearly dominated: “Tyśmienica”, “Słotwinka”, “Wisłok” (O 218), “Pojezierze” (O 70), “ulica Podwale” (O 60), “droga na Żupy Solne” (O 62), “Krajowy Związek Kredytorów”, and “ulica Leszniańska” as the equivalent of the actual ul. Liszniańska (O 236)...²³. Based on these observations, one might get the impression that Schulz polonized his prose in this way and that this was one of the goals of his literary strategy. But even such an impression would be false. In the Drohobych cinema from *The Cinnamon Shops*, actually called Urania, only American films are shown (OS 36) rather than Polish ones with Hanka Ordonówna or Eugeniusz Bodo, as was the case in the 1930s. The original Book found by Józef in Adela’s kitchen, resembles an old, yellowed Austro-Hungarian newspaper rather than a Polish one. Describing ul. Stryjska as the Street of Crocodiles, Schulz emphasized its pseudo-Americanness, not its Jewishness, Ukrainianness or Polishness. In detail, listing “tailors’ shops, general outfitters, china stores, drugstores, and barbers’ saloons”, railway station buildings, trains, trams (O 72–76), he did not even mention the corner synagogue that was there, or what names were listed on shop signs in that area of the city, and among them there were names of not only Jewish, but also Polish merchants. Also, the Polish-sounding ul. Floriańska, where he lived, did not make it into his prose. If Schulz did not want to be a “Jewish writer”, he equally did not want to be a “Polish writer”. In his writing, he tried to transcend both of these categories.

In an advertising note on the flap of *The Cinnamon Shops* published by “Rój”, Schulz wrote that in his prose he created “a legendary circle woven from fragments of all cultures and mythologies”, combining “a wealth of cultural elements” with “a strictly private and unique character dim” (OS 62). It is significant that he did not write that he associated this wealth “with a strictly local character”. The post-romantic idea of a “small homeland” or a domestic Galician homeland was completely alien to him. He was neither passionate about the local distinctiveness of the spirit of the place nor the unique specificity of the Drohobych melting pot of languages and cultures²⁴. In writing – unlike in drawing – he was guided by an iron rule: “No folklore titbits, no flirting and no local colour” – as he wrote with appreciation for the work of Ivon Andrić (AM 160). He made the Jewishness of space more clear only once in his prose, in “The Night of the Great Season”, where he compared his father to the prophets of Israel, the shop to Sinai, and the customers to the worshippers of Baal. But there, the “traders in silk barrels”

23 The street where the great Drohobych synagogue stands was formerly the street of Leon Reich, the leader of the Zionist movement in Galicia. However, we cannot find such a name in Schulz’s prose. The old map of Drohobych, mentioned in *The Street of Crocodiles*, shows a vast view of the city seen from above as far as the River Tysmienica and the lake district, but there is no Drohobych synagogue marked there either (O 70).

24 Cf. E. Prokop-Janiec, *Schulz and the Galician Melting Pot of Cultures*, “Periphery” 1997, no 1/2.

and “groups of Jews around red coats and big fur hubcaps” were compared to the members of the Sanhedrin (O 100).

Schulz’s frequent use of words of foreign origin, taken from many different languages, can be explained as a manifestation of his striving for the cosmopolitan character of his prose. This concerned not only the presented world, but also the structure of Schulz’s imagination and his linguistic sensitivity. From a statistical point of view, the number of expressions with connotations outside Jewish culture was much greater in his fiction than of expressions with biblical, customary and Judaic connotations²⁵. Schulz did not renounce his Jewishness in this way – such a conclusion would be unjustified; he only wanted it to be only one of many colours in his prose²⁶.

Treating the Bible in a similar manner, he eagerly referred to it in his stories²⁷. Contrary to popular approaches to the Scripture, for Schulz, the Bible was not a text of universal applicability, but one of many variants of the archetypal, universal Book from which all books on Earth originated. If Schulz talked about his longing for the “messianic times”, he did not mean only prophetic images of the waiting times from the Old Testament²⁸, on the contrary: he dissolved the Hebrew Bible in the common genealogy of universal culture, having in mind the time heralded by “all mythologies” (as he wrote in a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz of March 4, 1936 – KL 73)²⁹. Similarly, in a letter to Witkacy, he juxtaposed his own prose in one respect to Thomas Mann’s *The Tales of Jacob*, strongly emphasizing that for the German writer the symbolic basis of the narrative is the Bible (“biblical stories”), while for him that basis was completely different: such a symbolical basis was in the completely private mythology of the fictional family which he invented himself – therefore not the Bible (KL 65). “Second Book of Genesis” in *Treatise*



- 25** In “The Dead Season”, the father was compared to the biblical shepherd Jacob, but then to the Greek titan Atlas (O 244), and then to the Roman priest, the augur (O 246). The father of the firefighter seemed to the narrator of the stories to be like the Catholic saint, St. George at one point, and at another, a Roman praetorian and Michelangelo (O 221) at the same time.
- 26** When in a letter to Witkacy Schulz described the core of his soul – the iron capital of fantasy, on which, as he believed, he had built his work – he did not mention biblical images, but the completely private image of a cab, presenting it as the true foundation of his imagination (KL 63).
- 27** According to Ficowski, Schulz had no biblical imagination, he only mocked biblical motifs in his work (OS 68). However, I think this is too categorical an opinion. It would be more appropriate to say that Schulz treated the Bible as one of many traditions that could be used in his writing, sometimes entering into a more or less open dispute with the spirit of the Old Testament. See, e.g. J. Błoński, *Świat jako Księga i komentarz. O żydowskich źródłach twórczości Brunona Schulza*, “Polonistyka” 1993, no 4.
- 28** In “The Age of Genius”, there is a parable about the descent of the Messiah to earth, but it seems by all means ironic and grotesque, because at some point the Messiah loses the sense of the boundary between heaven and earth, and that is why he descends half-consciously into the world, which, moreover, does not notice his arrival at all (O 130).
- 29** In “A Second Autumn”, there appears the symbolic figure of a “wag-librarian” who tastes “jams from all ages and cultures” (O 230).

on *Mannequins* sounded as if it had been written a second time, blasphemously revised, heretical, intended to be much better, a truer version of the biblical Book of Genesis, because at key points it innovatively contradicted the spirit of the Hebrew original. *Treatise* referred to the Bible as much as it was written against the Bible. It is significant that in “The Mythologization of Reality”, the Bible was multiplied in an astonishing formula: “The old cosmogonies expressed it with the saying that in the beginning was the word”³⁰ (O 365), astonishing because it is in the Bible, and not in any “old cosmogony” that it talks about the “Word” that started it all. Moreover, in this sentence, the “word” was written by Schulz with a lowercase letter in a completely non-judaistic spirit, which can hardly be considered a coincidence. Schulz was also amused by transcultural associations – as distant and shocking as the semantic range of Peiper’s metaphor: put Don Quixote in Soplicowo and Robinson a few kilometers from Drohobych in Bolechów (O 230). His narrative imagination was deliberately syncretic to the highest degree³¹.

Schulz wrote about Franz Kafka in a similar way in his afterword to the Polish edition of *Der Process*. Recognizing him as a writer of “profound religious experiences”, he emphasized that Kafka’s way of thinking is part of the legacy of “the mysticism of all times and nations”. The word “all”, emphasizing the multinationality and timelessness of the inspirations from which Kafka was to benefit from, weakened the Jewish colour of *The Trial*. In its afterword, Schulz did not mention either the Bible or Jewish mysticism in reference to Kafka. The hyperbolic phrase “of all times and nations” emphasized the supra-Judaic character of the work of a writer from Prague. In Schulz’s eyes, Kafka was not a “Jewish writer” and did not want to be a “Jewish writer”. This is how Schulz presented him in his Polish text to Polish readers – as a writer of a universal and syncretic tradition – rather than of a Judaic-biblical one (KL 161–163).

As a writer, Schulz wanted to have a multicultural soul, but he did not want the multicultural world presented in his stories. He wanted to have a narrator with a multicultural imagination, but he did not care about any multicultural nature of the presented reality. He wanted to create a literary image of Drohobych as

30 English translation by John M. Bates – B. Schulz, “The Mythologization of Reality”, <http://www.brunoschulz.org/mythologization.htm>

31 Schulz’s imagination resembled that of a student of an Austro-Hungarian high school in the characteristically syncretic mixing of biblical, Catholic, Greek, Roman and other images. For example, in “The Book”, Germanic connotations were mixed with Transylvanian and ancient ones (Cymbri, “The Odyssey of Bearded Men” (O 116), the Hungarian Anna Csillag, Mr. Bosco of Milan, Magda Wang from Budapest, and next to the Christian Casper and Balthazar and the Egyptian phoenix). Anna Csillag herself appeared as the Galician Sibyl (O 111). In “A July Night”, the house after the birth of a child was described with expressions with Turkish connotations (“harem matriarchal atmosphere”, O 211), and then there were Greek connotations (“gynocracy”, O 212), biblical (“the hour of the Lord”, O 212), ancient (“odyssey” of the night adventures of a high school graduate, O 215), Greek (“black Proteus”, O 215) and Roman (“Orcus”, O 217).

a Polish town with a discreet, unobtrusive admixture of Jewish atmosphere, to which he was truly attached, but preferred not to expose it too much³². He was completely indifferent to other aspects of the spirit of the place. He wanted to be a universal writer, which he tried to achieve by universalizing the narrative imagination, accompanied by a simultaneous reduction of the local colour.

This is where he differs from post-Holocaust writers, a completely different spiritual and cultural formation. The Holocaust almost automatically made Central European Jewishness a universal issue. Schulz thought of the Jewishness and Jewish culture of Polish Eastern Galicia as one particular colour of universal culture, which was close to him as the spiritual colour of his hometown and family community, but also – as he felt it – it hindered him in what could qualify as modern processes of the universalization of the literary text, as long as it came to the fore in the narrative strategy. And this is probably why he wrote that the Hebrew Bible is not the real Authentic, i.e. the true Proto-Book from which all books existing on Earth are derived, but only one of thousands of copies of the Proto-Book; that is perhaps why he used the expression: “biblie i odyseje” (bibles and oddysseys) not only in the plural, but also with lowercase letters³³.

It was the Holocaust that transferred Central European Jews into universal culture. It was the Holocaust that turned them into a universal image of man. There could hardly be a greater or darker paradox. For post-Holocaust writers Julian Strykowski and Isaac Bashevis Singer, documenting the cultural folklore of pre-war Jewish communities from Eastern Galicia as a Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian “little homeland” was not at all inconsistent with the desire to universalize the literary text. For Schulz, it was completely inconsistent with universalization, and he avoided it as much as he could, following the strategy of the simultaneous unveiling and obscuring of Jewishness. Although in the first version of “Spring” he put open emphasis on the Jewishness of Easter, he never repeated this approach in his other texts³⁴. No Passover, no menorah, no rabbi, no tallit, no tefillin, no Yom Kippur, no yeshiva, no Purim...³⁵ Even the world of scents in *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* has been free of any clearer connotations of local Jewishness. There are no smells of bagels, challah, kugels,

32 The protagonist of “Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass” makes payments with an unspecified universal currency. He leaves a “silver coin” on the table (O 259), and when he begs as a railwayman, he collects “small coins” – with an unknown denomination and national character (O 276).

33 In the already mentioned fragment of the letter to Romana Halpern of September 19, 1936, Schulz wrote about the “barren Hadeses of fantasy” (KL 81) in the characteristic plural form.

34 “The Age of Genius” mentions “Easter holidays” (O 127), but Schulz did not specify whether Jewish or Catholic.

35 In all of Schulz’s prose, the word “Shabbat” appears once – in the story “August”, in combination with an allusion to the Gospel story about the Good Samaritan (O 4). Jewishness and Christianity intersected here in one sentence.

cholents and matzos... Biblical topos and customary props of Jewish culture were supposed to be only an element of the multicoloured narrative mosaic of the language that aimed at universality.

The gap between the pre-Holocaust Schulz and post-Holocaust writers is immense. It was they who wanted to be “Jewish writers”, because for them Jewish meant universal; Schulz, in turn, did everything not to seem like a “Jewish writer”, because Jewishness glowed with the locality of customs, holidays, costumes, rituals, language and place that narrowed the horizon of true literature³⁶. And so did Galician “Polishness” or “Ukrainianness”. The Holocaust changed everything here. If it were not for the Holocaust, Schulz would probably be one of several outstanding writers of the interwar periods. The Holocaust brought him to the top of Polish and world culture. The genocide forced many readers to read Schulz through its prism and still casts a dark shadow over him, which probably would not have pleased him at all, because he dreamed of a completely different type of universalization of his literary work and wanted to be at the top for a completely different reason. It sounds like a paradox: he was a private, universal man with an imagination encompassing – as put it – “all mythologies”, which made him neither entirely a Jewish writer, nor a Polish one; he was all the more so as a tragic victim of the Holocaust, ennobled by nostalgic memory.

Schulz considered his Jewish world in Drohobych to be permanent, firmly rooted in the earth, and not in danger of disappearing, even if this world was changing before his eyes under the influence of the economic expansion of capitalism into the highly ambiguous Street of Crocodiles³⁷, he saw no reason for a careful, literary documentation of the phenomenon of Jewish-Galician distinctiveness. Post-Holocaust writers invested their strength in the description of the decay and destruction of this world, because they saw in it a world marked by radical impermanence, fragile, with the seed of death in it, which is why it is so valuable to the literary heart and eye. In his prose, there is no trace of a premonition of the end of this world, even if no small number of readers of *The Cinnamon Shops* still want to see these traces there. Like Strykowski, he does not have the basic insight filled with evil tensions, predicting the impending catastrophe of dividing

36 Some researchers clearly describe Schulz as a “Jewish writer”, not really caring what he himself thought about it. See e.g., G. Moked, *Dwie galaktyki późnego modernizmu (świat przeszłości i modernizmu w twórczości dwóch żydowskich pisarzy z Galicji – Brunona Schulza i Samuela Josefa Agnona)*, “Literatura na Świecie” 1992, no 5/6.

37 According to Chciuk, rabbis met with Catholic priests at the healing springs in Truskavets, and the Ukrainian cultural atmosphere of the city was the dominant feature of pre-war Drohobych. Chciuk considered the name of the Greek Catholic Jordan to be the quintessence of the local spirit of the region, and in the local street dialect he found Italian, Tatar and Turkish influences. What was characteristic of the speech of the inhabitants of Drohobych was, as he emphasized, the Lviv drawl. See A. Chciuk, op. cit., p. 223. Nothing of this kind could be found in Schulz’s works.

the world into Jews and goyim. There is nothing of the marked distinctiveness of Jewish traditional dress and customs, there are no ritual activities in everyday life, prayers prescribed by the Mosaic Law, there are no *Kolnidre* songs. There is no Jewish district of Drohobych as a separate district, although before the war it occupied a separate part of the city. In Strykowski's *Austeria*, the Bible is a source book, in Schulz's case it is a forgery. Old Tag in Strykowski's novel is the guardian of Jewishness, old Jakub in Schulz is a rebellious heretic of Jewishness when he writes the second Bible – in his understanding, better and much more true than the ancient original – called by the narrator of *The Cinnamon Shops* “the second Book of Genesis”. For old Tag, Emperor Franz Joseph is a guarantor of a harmonious and good world, for Józef from Schulz's *Spring*, he is the guardian of the world as a boring prison of rules. In Strykowski's text, the rabbi before reading the Torah bows before the portrait of the emperor, because the emperor is a goy protégé of God, and Austria is the protector of the world. Tag's inn is the ark, and he is like Noah. Strykowski deals with the departure of Jews from their native tradition, the secularization of young Jewish intellectuals, their leftist tendencies or the extreme nature of the religious ecstasies of the Hasidim. For Schulz, these things did not exist. The Jewish-Christian ecumeny is not something he would be interested in. Strykowski, on the contrary, discussed the topic of the friendship of a Catholic priest with a Jew³⁸ – something completely alien to Schulz. And finally, in Strykowski's text there is that Ukrainian girlfriend of Jewdoch, the lover of the Jewish old man Tag, while in Schulz's work there is not find even a trace of the Ukrainian character of Drohobych and Galicia, even if in his times all servant maids in Drohobych were Ukrainian. His prose also lacks the colours of the language of assimilated Jews, even if that is specifically the language many inhabitants of Drohobych must have spoken at the time. And finally, there is no nostalgic longing for the shtetl from Antoni Słonimski's “Elegy of Jewish Towns”, even if we like to attribute it to Schulz³⁹, looking at his literary work (and his drawings) through the dark lens of the Holocaust, which he certainly would not have wanted at all.

38 See M. J. Dudziak, *Etnografie Brunona Schulza. Próba antropologicznego ujęcia “Ulicy Krokodyli” jako analizy miasta*, “Konteksty” 1998, no 3/4.

39 Cf. K. Więclawska, *Obraz społeczności shtetl w twórczości Singera i Schulza*, “Kresy” 1999, no 40.

Małgorzata Ogonowska: Bruno Schulz, the Man

Reconstruction of Schulz's (un)masculinity

Bruno Schulz... Artist, writer, teacher, resident of Drohobych...

If all these terms are used in the Polish language to refer to Bruno Schulz, they are always used in the masculine form. Still, though, Schulz is thought and written about as a man very rarely or not at all. If so, it is most often through motifs characteristic for his artistic work and his writings that revealed references to sexuality and masochism. There is mention of a castration dream described in a letter to Stefan Szuman¹, and there are discussions (especially recent ones) of the writer's relationships with women². Questions are rarely asked about Schulz as a man, a man seen in a specific historical and social context, and not about the men and masculinities so numerous represented in Schulz's work and so willingly subjected to various interpretations³.

Of course, my article will not fill this gap entirely, and does not have such ambitions. It has just occurred to me that in Schulz's case, being a man was a form of toil and that few people saw him as a man. Why was it the case?

Before I try to answer this question, I must make a few caveats. The portrait that I will present has nothing to do (or has little to do) with my perception of Schulz and my views on his life, work, interpretation of his work and treatment

1 See B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 36–37 (KL I, 3).

2 A. Tuszyńska, *Narzeczoną Schulza. Apokryf*, Warszawa 2015; A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, Gdańsk 2016.

3 Here are a few examples: A. Lindskog, *Subwersja seksualności. Komentarz o różnicy seksualnej i męskości u Brunona Schulza w kontekście nowoczesnej heteroseksualności*, w: *Przed i po. Bruno Schulz*, red. J. Olejniczak, Kraków 2018, p. 89–103; D. Sosnowska, *Dwie kobiety i mężczyzna czyli Traktat teologiczny Brunona Schulza*, "Kresy" 1993, nr 14, p. 50–56; K. Jankowska, *Kobiety i mężczyźni czyli o dwoistej linii dziedziczenia wartości w świecie Brunona Schulza*, w: *Literatura w kręgu wartości. Materiały VI sesji z cyklu "Świat jeden ale nie jednolity"*, red. L. Wiśniewska, Bydgoszcz 2003, p. 285–294; A. Kato, *Motyw deformacji w prozie Brunona Schulza: mężczyzna, kobieta, sztuka*, "Kresy" 2004, nr 3, p. 132–139; E. Świąc, *Ciotka Agata i mężczyźni o zamglonych oczach. O „Sierpniu” Brunona Schulza*, w: *Literatura i perwersje. Szkice o literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, red. B. Gutkowska i A. Nęcka, Katowice 2013, p. 24–35. If you are interested in more bibliographic details, please visit <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/bibliografia/przedmiotowa>. It is probably the most complete bibliography of texts devoted to Schulz and his work.

of his biography. I focus here primarily on the reconstruction of a certain social image of this particular man set in a specific context. I try to recreate this image from fragments of other people's memories, accounts, and random references⁴, noticing a certain regularity in it that leads to general conclusions that can be abstracted from references to gender and time.

However, I return to my basic question: why could being a man be such hardship for Schulz, and what is it that questioned this part of his identity in the eyes of his contemporaries? I think there are at least six reasons – though this list could certainly be expanded – namely:

he was an ugly weakling,

he was a sickly sissy in constant depression,

and this sexuality: was he impotent? erotomaniac? pervert?

what is more, he was a wet sock and a victim of fate,

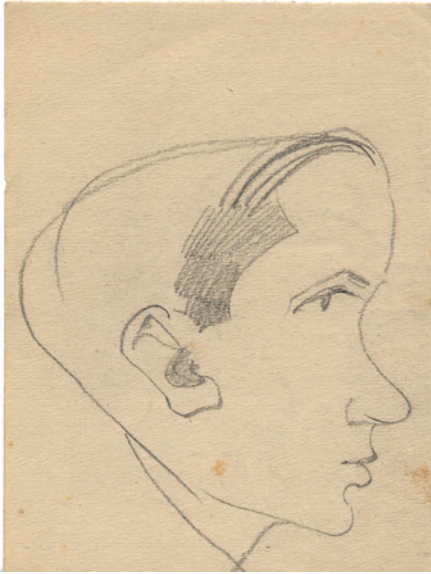
he lived in the shadow of a resourceful, connected and well-to-do brother,

he was a burden rather than support for his family.

Such an image – distorting or exaggerating Schulz's actual features and attitudes, and having its source in stereotypes of masculinity characteristic not only of his era⁵ – emerges from many memories about him. Of course, the terms I mentioned are a kind of extract drawn from stories about Schulz, from references to letters and diaries of his close friends, including Witkacy, Gombrowicz, and Nałkowska. Because even those who sincerely admired and appreciated him as an artist, an extremely talented and interesting man, had trouble with Schulz as a man.

4 Of course, I do not quote all the examples, I choose those that are the most characteristic or most representative of the six reasons I have selected for the perception of Schulz as unmanly or a non-male.

5 Although I do not disclose these readings directly in my argument (focusing on my own research goal), the projects focused on masculinity studies convinced me that it was justified to ask this particular question about Schulz as a man. The most important work in the Schulz context seems to be Wojciech Śmieja's work *Męskości dwudziestolecia międzywojennego i ich reprezentacja w literaturze (wybrane przykłady)*, published in the second volume of *Formy męskości*, pod red. Adam Dziadek (Warszawa 2018, p. 261–360). Other volumes are also important: *Formy męskości 1*, red. A. Dziadek i F. Mazurkiewicz, Warszawa 2018; *Formy męskości 3. Antologia przekładów*, red. A. Dziadek, Warszawa 2018, and a dedicated issue of "Teksty Drugie" 2015, nr 2. Other important publications worth mentioning include dissertations and collective works: T. Kaliściak, *Katastrofy odmieńców*, Katowice 2011; B. Kwaśny, *Polskie studia nad męskością*, "Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej" 2009, nr 1 (11), p. 7–28; F. La Cecla, *Szorstkim być. Antropologia mężczyzny*, przeł. H. Serkowska, Warszawa 2014; *Męskość jako kategoria kulturowa. Praktyki męskości*, red. M. Dąbrowska, A. Radomski, Lublin 2010; *(Nie)męskość w tekstach kultury XIX–XXI wieku*, red. B. Zwolińska i K. M. Tomala, Gdańsk 2019; *Stereotypy i wzorce męskości w różnych kulturach świata*, red. Bożena Płonka-Syroka, Warszawa 2008; W. Śmieja, *Hegemonia i trauma. Literatura wobec dominujących fikcji męskości*, Warszawa 2017; "Uwikłani w płęć" – od wytwarzania i reprodukcji męskości po formy przekraczania płci, "Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica" 2017, nr 18 (2).



Zenon Waśniewski, **Caricature of Bruno Schulz**, August 1935, pencil, paper, 17 × 12.5 cm, property of Florentyna Radwańska, Chełm Lubelski, photo by Jerzy Jacek Bojarski

on the right Bruno Schulz, photo from the early 1930s

Ugly weaking

Famous images of Schulz – both period photographs and self-portraits – show a short man of slight build. His face is slim and long, his forehead high, with transverse furrows, which in some images seem very deep. The whole is complemented by dark hair, dark eyes (quite deep-set, which enhances the impression of a piercing look), thick eyebrows, rather large, protruding ears, narrow lips with clearly marked, falling corners. He looks similar both as a young man – though in earlier images he looks at us more boldly – and as a mature one.

In one of the first post-war texts about Schulz, written by Ernestyna Podhorizer-Zajkin, there is the following description: “He is ugly, scrawny, his arms and legs are excessively long, his back is stooped, and his chest sunken. He has an unattractive, slim face of an unhealthy complexion”⁶. He was described similarly in Michał Chajes’s letter to Jerzy Ficowski: “By nature [...], he was skinny and physically underdeveloped, excessively thin. He had a fallen breast, a terrible pallor or yellowness of the complexion, an elongated head, sunken bony cheeks, in which large black eyes glowed with some incredible light, over which fell a lush, soft head of dark, little-groomed hair. His general slouch and the terrifying thinness of his legs and long arms created a figure that was strangely subtle, but as if predatory, somewhat reminiscent of a spider, and at the same time inconspicuous and shy”⁷.

Both of these descriptions roughly correspond to what we can see in existing images of Schulz. But there is something striking in them: the accumulation of negatively emotional and pejorative terms and comparisons: “ugly”, “physically underdeveloped”, “thin”, “skinny”, “excessively thin”, “bony”, “hunched”, “arms and legs are excessively long”, “terrifying thinness of legs and long arms”, “slouching”, “sunken chest”, “sank chest”, “unattractive slim face”, “elongated head”, “sunken bony cheeks”, “unhealthy complexion”, “appalling pallor or yellowness of the complexion”, “poorly cared for hair”, and finally the comparison to a spider.

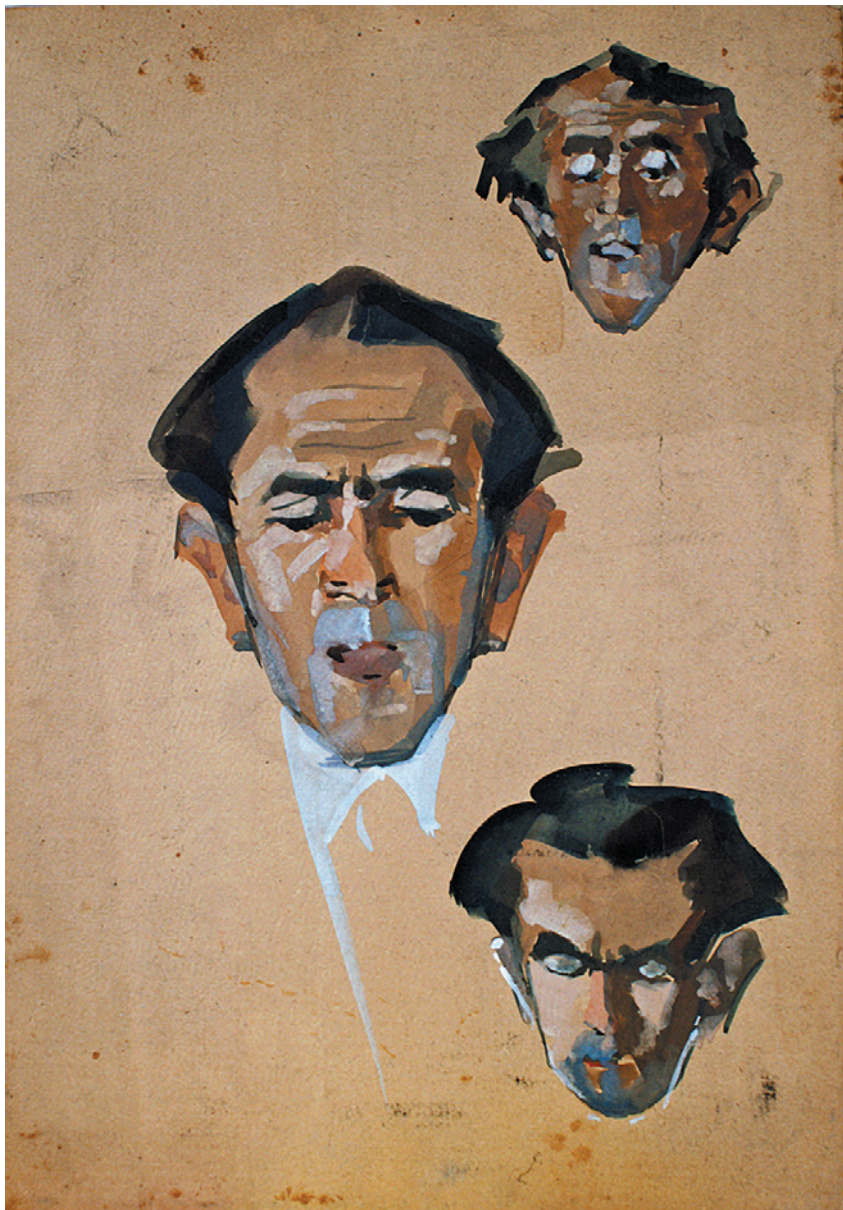
This image is almost a caricature. The quoted descriptions attempt to capture elements in Schulz’s appearance that slightly nuance and break down this portrait of the ugly man. So Schulz has – as Chajes describes – “black eyes [that] glowed with some incredible light”. Podhorizer echoes him: “There is so much captivating charm and depth in his dark, intelligent eyes and discreet

⁶ E. Podhorizer-Zajkin, *Pamięci Brunona Schulza, literata i artysty malarza*, “Opinia” 1949, nr 50, p. 20.

⁷ Attachment to the letter from Michał Chajes to Jerzy Ficowski of June 7, 1948 (*Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków*. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje, oprac. J. Kandziora, Gdańsk 2022).



Bruno Schulz, photographs from the 1930s



Zenon Waśniewski, **Triple Portrait of Bruno Schulz**, August 1935, tempera, cardboard, 51 × 36 cm, property of Florentyna Radwańska, Chełm Lubelski, photo by Jerzy Jacek Bojarski

statements that his peers always listen to him carefully and none of them dare to get to know this extraordinary boy”.

Schulz’s physicality is also defined by his hands. Podhorizer writes: “Schulz had incredibly beautiful hands, with long bony fingers that lovingly wrapped a pencil or a pen. From these spiritual hands flowed as if the entire extraordinary soul of this fascinating man and artist”. Chajes also believes that after getting to know Schulz more closely, what captivated him was “apart from the depth and mysterious glow of his eyes – his delicate, thin hands, with long thin fingers, yet strangely soft, as if caressingly holding and guiding a pen or a brush. There was so much charm, so much beauty and energy in these fingers that they stimulated even the most prosaic observer to think and analyse the mystery they concealed”.

It is worth noting that in these fragments the focus shifts from the description of the man to the description of the artist and writer (“discreet statements”, “a man radiant with knowledge and artistic flair”), which is additionally emphasized in Chajes’s words: “Among his group of colleagues, this man of a minor body and a major knowledge and artistic flair seemed to always get lost”. Eyes, hands, expression – these are the attributes of the soul, creativity, the quintessence of an artist.

So what was Schulz like? Beautiful as an artist, ugly, even repulsive as a man... Being an artist allows him to be an unattractive man, justifies this unfortunate condition and makes it easier for others to accept it. Talent makes society ready to forgive ugliness and fragility – however understood, depending on the times and canons. Ultimately, we do not eliminate all the monstrous ones – we can spare the ones who are “beautiful in spirit”?

Sickly sissy

Schulz was the youngest child of his parents, the apple of his mother’s eye. “While living in this house – writes Chajes – I always felt a lot of this specific motherly warmth and kindness, especially when it came to the youngest Brunio. [...] This woman devoted most of her life to Samaritan duties, first towards her husband and later towards Bruno, whose fragile health required constant care and precaution. – She never raised her hand or even her voice to him, tolerating only a few and quite innocent antics or the whims of her spoiled little son. And further about Schulz: “Constant colds, a runny nose and other ailments were constantly bothering him, making him even more shy because, by contrast, he suffered twice because of his physical deficiency, seeing himself handicapped in front of his rosy-cheeked friends, bursting with health and vitality”.

Other memories, as well as source materials and mentions by Schulz in his preserved letters, also emphasize the writer's poor health⁸. What is more, Jerzy Ficowski imposed an emphasis on Schulz through the prism of weakness and illness. This is how Ficowski's narrative about Schulz begins: "On July 12, 1892, the youngest son was born in the Schulz merchant family, the third and last child, the frailest of the siblings".⁹

On the basis of Bruno Schulz's personal files, documenting his work as a teacher at a secondary school in Drohobych, it is possible to quite precisely create a catalogue of ailments and diseases that bothered the writer. These include frequent colds, flu (with complications), angina, inflammation and catarrh of the trachea, pleurisy, periostitis, various stomach problems, gastric fever, heart neurosis and other ailments of this organ, mysterious stinging in the side, chronic inflammation of the bladder, renal pelvis and prostate gland, depression¹⁰.

He was ill from an early age, so he was perceived as frail, physically and mentally weak. This sickness – recalled by Schulz's friends and repeated constantly, not without the participation of Schulz himself, who often refers to his poor health in his preserved correspondence¹¹ – becomes the main factor that determined his life and his being a man. Mentions of this sickness do not sound compassionate or understanding, but rather lenient and paternalistic. Sometimes you can see in them an unasked question about whether it was fake and not real – and whether it was not a handy excuse and justification for a kind of desertion in the face of life's challenges and inconveniences, which Schulz is sometimes accused of¹².

Or maybe this question should be asked in a different way? Maybe we should assume that Schulz was so sickly or subjectively felt that way, and measure this weakness by how he lived and worked despite everything?



8 I devoted a paper to Schulz's diseases during the conference "Schulz – Słownik mówiony" [Schulz – Spoken Dictionary], which took place on November 18–19, 2016. For the needs of the "Calendar of the life, work and reception of Bruno Schulz" (<https://schulzforum.pl/pl/>), I have prepared a series of daily entries re constructing this aspect of the writer's biography.

9 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 17. Unless otherwise noted, the highlight in quotes here and thereafter comes from me – MO.

10 Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Lviv, Lviv Board of Trustees Lviv, years 1921–1939, F 179, O 7, volume XIII, folders 29376 and 29379. Cf. also G. Józefczuk, *Samobójczyni, lekarz i pisarz. Paradoxy opowieści z "półtora miasta"*, in: *Bruno Schulz: teksty i konteksty. Materiały VI Międzynarodowego Festiwalu Brunona Schulza w Drohobyczu*, red. W. Meniok, Drohobycz 2016, p. 510–515.

11 Cf. for example KL I 12, 20, 28, 31, 97, 113, 114, 115, 119, 130, 134.

12 This question also returns in relation to other aspects of Schulz's life. Cf. P. Sitkiewicz, "Jednakowoż bez pieniędzy". *Sytuacja materialna Brunona Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 12, 2018, p. 127–135; M. Ogonowska, "Byłem już w myśli pozbawiony posady i w ostatniej nędzy". *Nie tylko o finansach Schulza głos drugi*, "Schulz/Forum" 12, 2018, p. 136–152. In the text quoted here, I also attempted to provide a nuanced assessment of Schulz's life and financial situation and his attitude towards the challenges this situation presented him with.

But can a real man get sick? And if he is already sick, should he admit his illnesses? Especially since – what is worse – some of the ailments that plagued Schulz, such as chronic cystitis, could affect sexual performance, and therefore also the stereotypically and superficially understood masculinity.

Impotent? Erotomaniac? Pervert?

Schulz's sexuality – both the one manifested in his visual and literary works, as well as that practiced (or not practiced) by him in his life – has been investigated on many levels both during the artist's life and today (and many answers were given, which do not necessarily close the matter)¹³. In the light of Schulz's drawings and, for example, *Wywiad drastyczny*¹⁴, this interest is not surprising. It is also not surprising that sometimes it is essentially gossipy in nature. Because the imagination was often ignited not so much by his individual corporeality, sexuality, and eroticism, but the corporeality, sexuality, and eroticism of somebody else.

And Schulz was different indeed. If only because he was defined by his – unmanly? – morbid shyness. Those who remember the writer, frequently connect this shyness to his appearance. Of course, it was manifested in Schulz's behaviour in general, but it is particularly eagerly recalled and interpreted in the context of his relationships with women. It becomes more important when it is observed in connection to Schulz's drawings that are full of masochistic and fetishist motifs.

I will quote Podhorizer-Zajkin again: “The artist likes to place his figure among the pack of [...] stunted individuals. [...] That [masochism] was close to him is evidenced by one of his self-portraits, where we see Schulz at the easel in his atelier full of this type of works. Perhaps it was related to the artist's physically unattractive appearance, which had a rather repulsive effect on women.

Chajes puts it even more explicitly: “All [Schulz's youthful loves], emerging here and there, emphasized the servility of his gaze¹⁵, a touch that, lacking the strength and spirit of masculinity, made them feel rather afraid. These fresh feelings for the women were quite lasting, more than fleeting, and Schulz made his living, painting, and drawing them in various forms, mostly as tamers of gangs of male servants. And then Chajes adds: “There were unsubstantiated rumours about his sexual impotence among his colleagues, but no certainty – or personal admissions – can be spoken of in this regard”.

13 In order not to multiply the footnotes excessively, I refer only to the “masochistic” issue of “Schulz/Forum” 7, 2016.

14 J. Nacht, *Wywiad drastyczny* (Rozmowa z Brunonem Schulzem), “*Nasza Opinia*” 1937, nr 77, p. 5.

15 This definition seems to contradict other descriptions of Schulz's eyes given by Chajes.



Zenon Waśniewski, **Caricature of Bruno Schulz**,
August 1935, pencil, paper, 21 × 17 cm, Museum
of Literature in Warsaw

These and similar fragments of memories¹⁶ ambiguously suggest that Schulz's sexuality found an outlet mainly in his fantasies (which manifested themselves in his art) and that it could not be realized in relationships with women, because his appearance "had a rather repulsive effect on women" and "caused fear in them". In others, we find references to the fact that he found fulfilment only thanks to the services of prostitutes¹⁷.

In any case, Schulz's complicated sexuality seems, somewhat troubling¹⁸. It certainly was like that for Jerzy Ficowski, who (quite willingly?) passed over some aspects in silence, while he subjected others to over-interpretations¹⁹. Tadeusz Lubowiecki did not avoid a strange tone – somewhat tinged with sensationalism, despite reservations and requests for discretion and sensitive use of information. Describing in a letter to Ficowski – as he put it – Schulz's *vita sexualis*, he wrote the following: "It's an old, ugly story, interesting only because it concerns an outstanding artist"²⁰.

During Schulz's lifetime, his sexuality was also the object of crude jokes. This seems to be confirmed by an anecdote provided by Jerzy Pomianowski and corroborated in the correspondence of its main character, Alicja Dryszkiewicz²¹:

Alicja said that Witkiewicz took her to Drohobych, because Mr Schulz's second book, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* had just been published. Already on the train, Witkiewicz told her:

'Alicja, when we get to Mr. Bruno Schulz's house, I will knock at the door and then step back. When he opens the door and sees you, you are to slap him in the face as a greeting.'

16 Cf. "He once told me that when he's overcome with lust, instead of going to a girl, he draws, and finds sexual satisfaction in it. I have the impression that this was the rule due to extreme shyness. [...] He was awkward and shy around society women. When he made friends and became more familiar, he allowed himself to say joking things like: 'Hit me at the mouth' or 'Kick me hard'. Of course, he was blamed for this. However, it was not suspected that he was a pervert of any kind; instead, it was attributed to his originality" (*Trzy listy Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana) do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 1948 roku*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 210).

17 Cf. for example A. Chciuk, *Ziemia księżycowa. Druga opowieść o Księżtwie Bałaku*, Warszawa 1989, p. 78–79; W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, Warszawa 2013, p. 376; S. Rosiek, *Odcięcie. Siedem fragmentów*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 61 (letter of Alicja Dryszkiewicz to Tadeusz Bereza of 24 December 1992).

18 I will take up certain threads of this topic – taking as a starting point, among others, the memories of Irena Kejlin-Mitelman and Joanna Kulmowa – in the article I am currently preparing *Komin albo niezadane pytania*.

19 This is interpreted in detail by Marcin Romanowski in the text *Masochizm Schulza w ujęciu Ficowskiego* ("Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 99–120).

20 *Trzy listy Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana...)*, p. 209.

21 Both accounts are analysed by Stanisław Rosiek, op. cit., p. 56–58.

‘I’ll never do that’, said Alicja, who was by no means a shy girl. She had read Schulz’s books and was already intimately close to, or expert at, literature.

‘If you don’t agree, you will get off this train and never get to the station’, said Witkiewicz.

So she agreed and they went to the famous house and the famous annex where Schulz lived and which was described so beautifully by Jerzy Ficowski, the best specialist in the world on Schulz’s work. They knocked on the door, Witkiewicz took two steps back and pushed Alicja forward. The door opened, and a small man stood there, leaning forward, looking under his eyebrows, under his bowed head. He didn’t even have time to speak when Alicja obeyed Witkiewicz’s orders like an automaton and slapped Bruno Schulz in the face. He fell at her feet, shouting: ‘Queen!’²²

So even Witkacy and Witold Gombrowicz²³, who both undoubtedly sympathized with Schulz²⁴, treated this sphere of Schulz’s life with a certain indelicate ridicule, even if such an approach, of course, must be perceived as part of the totality of their personality, values and attitudes.

But Schulz’s sexuality seemed strange or provoked jokes not (or not primarily) because it was overtly masochistic and fetishist. It was something strange, because compared to Schulz’s appearance, perceived as unattractive, the writer’s sickness and introverted character traits, seemed an impossible aberration – and would probably seem so regardless of how it was manifested and realized. Yet sexuality is a natural and basic function of the human body. In addition, it was unmanly, because Schulz was perceived as unmanly. However, he had no influence on the criteria of this unmanliness.

A wet sock and a victim of fate

Perhaps it would be possible to take Schulz’s sexuality seriously if he fulfilled himself as a husband and breadwinner. But no, Schulz – though he had numerous

22 *To proste. Opowieści Jerzego Pomianowskiego nagrane przez Joannę Szwedowską dla Programu II Polskiego radia*, red. E. Jogała, Kraków–Budapeszt 2015, p. 216.

23 He writes, among other things: “Yesterday I came up with the idea of a certain doctor’s wife, whom I met accidentally at number eighteen. ‘Bruno Schulz’, she said, ‘is either a sick pervert or a poseur; but most likely a poseur’. [...] Or maybe, by giving free rein to your masochistic tendencies, you will humiliate yourself and fall at the feet of the doctor’s well-fed wife” (W. Gombrowicz, *Do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio” 1936, nr 7, p. 217–218).

24 It is impossible not to recall at this point a fragment from Schulz’s letter to Romana Halpern: “Witkacy advises me to completely change the topic ‘in order to tighten the fallopian tubes and to have the final sperm ejaculation’. But don’t quote me with him, because he will accuse me of indiscretion, even though it’s about my potency, not his” (KL I, 92) – even if it is not at all about male potency, but creative one.

erotic and friendly relationships with women – never started a family. There is a recurring theme of Schulz's indecisiveness, inability to make binding decisions, procrastination and the constant looking for excuses. We should add that similar threads also appear in the preserved letters of Schulz himself.

The writer was troubled not only by fundamental issues affecting his entire life, but also by smaller, immediate ones. In various life matters, he asked for help from acquaintances and friends, seeking their support and protection. This was the case, with his trip to Paris and the issue of registering his residence in Katowice, which was to enable him to marry Józefina Szelińska.

But even when he took decisive action, he was sometimes seen as strange and ridiculous. Special mention is made of Schulz, who in 1933 came to Warsaw with the manuscript of *The Cinnamon Shops*²⁵. He showed up at the guesthouse of Magdalena Gross, a sculptor visited by Warsaw intellectuals. The author of this account reports:

On Easter Sunday, at noon, between my place at the table and Magdalena's, I found a little man sitting, almost Chaplin-esque, who quietly uttered his name, which meant nothing to me or Magda. Magda, a bit ironically, asked him about the purpose of his visit.

'I am a drawing teacher in Drohobych and I came to the capital by the Dancing, Skiing, Bridge train.'

'Are you a dancer, a sportsman or a bridge player?', continued Magda, amused by the little man.

'No, ma'am. I have come to this guesthouse because I was informed that writers and critics would be found here.'

'And why does a drawing teacher need writers and critics?'

'Because I brought with me a book that I wrote and I would like to read it to someone so that he can give me his opinion about it.'

To Magdalena Gross's next mocking comment, "the little man looked [her] straight in the eye and said in a decisive tone: "The fate of my book depends on you. I know that you are a friend of Zofia Nałkowska and if you call her and ask her to accept me, she will not refuse".

This whole story, as we know, had a happy ending: Nałkowska's opinion was enthusiastic, and Schulz's stories were soon published. However, it is not the

25 Alicja Giangrande's account in a letter to Jerzy Ficowski of April 16, 1985 (*Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków*). Also published in the book *Gombrowicz w Argentynie. Świadczenia i dokumenty 1939–1963*, przeł. Z. Chądzyńska, A. Husarska, Kraków 2004. See also J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 59–60. I recall this memory, seeing in it traces of a certain stereotypical perception of Schulz as a man, and I completely ignore the issue of factual inaccuracies hidden here.

facts that are interesting in Giangrande's account, but the way in which Schulz was described, and the feelings he generated – in this case in women, but the reactions were similar among men, too. He was met with jokes, mockery, and disregard. He was treated this way only because of his appearance, shyness and the first impression he made on those gathered.

Magdalena Gross's joke referring to the name of the train on which Schulz arrived in Warsaw from Drohobych unintentionally reveals the power of the stereotype. Well, Schulz did not have the appearance and manners of a dancer, sportsman or casino goer, he did not look like a cavalryman, a lover, or a diplomat, nor did he fit into the popular image of poets, writers and artists²⁶. If it were not for the book he had under his arm, if it were not for the request – why was it even answered? – for Nałkowska's support, he would remain only a “man”, someone who does not fit into the canons of masculinity, perhaps defenceless in the face of ridicule. There is a poignant trace of unrealized cruelty towards otherness in this memory.

But the later perception of this story is equally interesting. Well, in the context of publishing *The Cinnamon Shops*, Nałkowska's role is always mentioned, but never, or at least I have not found such a relationship, the energy and determination with which Schulz fought for his debut. This event would rather motivate one to ask whether Schulz – with all the complexity of his character, evident shyness, depressive tendencies and introvert nature – was in fact such a failure in life as he was sometimes perceived or wanted to be perceived²⁷.

In the shadow of his older brother

The personality and achievements of his older brother Izydor undoubtedly cast a shadow over Schulz. The brother was appreciated by Schulz himself, who wrote about him as follows just after his death: “He was an extraordinary man, beloved by all who came in contact with him, with truly evangelical kindness, young, elegant, full of success and at the peak of a brilliant career – he was one of the main figures of the Polish oil industry. [...] My brother maintained my household, i.e. sister and nephew, he was the breadwinner for a whole series of families that now found themselves in trouble. It's going to be hard now – I don't know what I'll do”²⁸. And

26 See also W. Śmieja, *Męskości dwudziestolecia międzywojennego i ich reprezentacja w literaturze (wybrane przykłady)*, p. 261–360.

27 Piotr Sitkiewicz's “*Jednakowoż bez pieniędzy*” is an exception. Although I disagree with the author on many issues, a fragment of the conclusion of his article seems to me very important: “A popular biographical trait – which, in my opinion, should be opposed because it simplifies Schulz's personality and work in a harmful way – says that he was a somewhat forgotten, helpless, shy, poor, overworked, provincial teacher who produced some genius works in the comfort of his modest Drohobych home” (p. 134).

28 KL I 39, p. 83.

in another letter from the same period: “He died not only to his family, whom he left behind, but also to me and his sister and nephew, all of whom he supported. He was a man whom everyone smiled at and talked about with admiration. Elegant, beautiful, and refined, he charmed and attracted people”²⁹.

This description is consistent with the image evoked by people from outside the family world. In the memoirs of Michał Chajes, we read: “On the other hand, his brother, Engineer Szulc is a very ambitious and talented man who, on his own, rose to the influential and lucrative position of director of the Galicja oil joint stock company. He was always connected with his brother by bonds of sincere devotion and friendship. Therefore, Bruno was very attached to his brother, who always supported him with advice and – not once – materially”. But there is something else in this account – elements that question Bruno Schulz’s agency in life: “When after graduating from high school in 1911, and following his inclination and talent, Bruno went to Vienna to study at the local Academy of Fine Arts, his brother did not allow him to continue studies in painting as they did not seem to promise enough of a financial success, and after only one year the brother influenced him to change his mind, after which Bruno enrolled at the Lviv polytechnic’s Faculty of Architecture. But he also gave up these studies after 2 or 3 years due to lack of funds and poor health.

And again: the memory does not entirely stand up to confrontation with sources and documents – the stay in Vienna and the studies there were different³⁰ – but it is its tone and message. Because what does this memory mean? Namely, Schulz did not decide about anything, he submitted to the will of others or capitulated in the face of hardships and external circumstances.

Chajes’s mention of Schulz’s financial problems is also significant: “Apart from the ordeals related to the illness and death of his father and the suicide of his brother-in-law, Szulc’s childhood was peaceful and relatively prosperous. Only the subsequent impoverishment after the death of his father affected the growing boy³¹ unpleasantly, and this deficit has impact on him until the very end. The thread of Schulz’s financial problems appears in many other accounts, and is confirmed by his correspondence³². While Izydor was alive, which is clear from the extracts from Bruno’s letters just quoted, the writer could count on his support.

The theme of Izydor’s successes and Bruno’s failures, which appears many times in the memories of friends and family, puts the two brothers in opposition.

29 KL I 40, p. 84.

30 Cf. calendar entries prepared by Joanna Sass: <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/autorzy/joan-na-sass> (accessed: 25/01/2020).

31 The year his father died, Bruno Schulz was twenty-three years old, so he was certainly no longer an “adolescent boy”.

32 See among others, KL I 29, p. 70; 42, p. 86; 43, p. 87; 66, p. 112; 81, p. 139 – 140; 86, p. 147; 87, p. 148; 90, p. 153; 101, p. 169.

There was Izydor – resourceful, well-off, helping others, not only his own family, showing his brother the right life choices and supporting him in various situations, in short: a man who fits the stereotype of the head of the family. And there was Bruno, too – always complaining about the lack of money, torn between his reluctance to work as a teacher and the need to earn a living, financing his debut with his brother’s money. Brother-winner and brother-loser.

Although everyone emphasizes the bonds between the brothers, they also emphasize the contrast of their competences and life attitudes. This is frequent juxtaposition deprecates (more or less intentionally, consciously) Schulz as a man – and despite, as I once tried to show, testimonies that could be interpreted “as a kind of sacrifice and responsibility for loved ones, which grew from rational premises and life experience”³³.

A burden to the family

If it really were as it is quite commonly suggested by the sources and memories about Schulz, he would not be a support for the family, but a burden: a sick loser in constant depression, an unfulfilled artist who abandoned artistic work in favour of writing and managed to publish only two small volumes of stories, a drawing teacher who hated his job and manual work, unable to break away from this treadmill that weighed heavily on him.

And yet he managed to cope, although it was not easy and without sacrifices. Moreover, as a family guardian, he probably proved himself several times: this was the case in Vienna during World War I, and this was also the case after the death of his mother, when, as Michał Chajes reports, “in order to obtain the means of living which [...] it was increasingly difficult for him to get, he decided to publish a dozen or so of his best drawings, multiplied using *the cliché-verre* technique, in the so-called *The Booke of Idolatry*, luxuriously bound in cloth. The artist himself provided each individual copy with decorative inscriptions and vignettes. It was sold, I think, for PLN 100 a piece, and was apparently in big demand in Warsaw”.

About his efforts and situation, Schulz wrote, among others, to Romana Halpern in 1936: “I don’t want to complain, but I live in very tight and embarrassing conditions. I live in two rooms with my widowed sister, a very nice person, but sick and sad, with an older cousin who runs our farm, and with my nephew, a 26-year-old young man who is something of a melancholic. That’s why I think marriage will be a change for the better for me. I just don’t know if I can maintain two houses because my family has no income”³⁴. About a year later:

³³ This is one of the conclusions of my article “*Byłem już w myśli pozbawiony posady i w ostatniej nę-dzy*” (p. 147).

³⁴ KL I, 81, p. 139–140.

“Don’t be angry that I rewarded your efforts and concerns with a refusal. If you consider my situation more closely, you will realize that I could not accept this offer. I have already told you that I have three dependents (a sister, a cousin, a nephew) whom I cannot completely abandon to the mercy of fate. I now earn about PLN 300 a month. If I were given a job in Warsaw under similar conditions, I would leave because I could live there for PLN 200 and send PLN 100 to my family. At Mr. Ramberg, however, I would have 2 to 6 hours of work – I would make PLN 100 at most. I cannot leave my government job (7th level) for these few hours because that job provides me with a pension. I don’t have enough courage, sufficient impulse or desire to take such a risky step”³⁵.

Schulz took the obligation to take care of his loved ones very seriously, although this aspect of his life is sometimes interpreted as an escapist excuse from taking risks and making final, binding life decisions.

Or maybe this was the binding decision, even though Schulz – as he himself wrote – endured the hardships resulting from the fulfilment of this obligation in an “unmanly” manner. In 1934, he confided to Zenon Waśniewski: “I am ashamed in front of you of my tearful unmanliness, the notoriousness of doubt – you are so much braver than me and you endure your fate so much more manfully!”. And in 1937 he wrote to him: “It’s rude to complain all the time and not in a manly way, but I must say that something is broken in me”³⁶.

Social castration

It is time to reach a conclusion, but before I do, I will mention two more quotes. One has already been used here, but I need to come back to it. Chajes wrote about Schulz: “Apart from the illness and death of his father and the suicide of his brother-in-law, Szulc’s childhood was peaceful and relatively prosperous”. If one remembers about the death of Schulz father, and the experience of suicide in Schulz’s family, such words about a peaceful and relatively prosperous life sound false. This falsehood will be even more obvious if we realize that Schulz, as a very young man, was, among other things, a witness of the bloody elections in Drohobych, then was a war refugee, and experienced the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Russian wars in 1918–1921. In later years, his life attitude and decisions could have been influenced by national tensions (Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Jewish and Jewish-Ukrainian), uncertainty related to the years of crisis, and the increasingly clear rumblings of the coming war³⁷.

³⁵ KL I, 90, p. 153.

³⁶ KL I, 36, p. 78, and 47, pp. 91.

³⁷ I am briefly returning to the topic that I discussed in more detail in the article “*Byłem już w myśli pozbawiony posady i w ostatniej nędzy*” (p. 141–147).

The second quote comes from Emil Górski's memoir: "Schulz, sickly and tired of monotonous work, surrounded by ill and mentally deranged members of his family, was aware of his miserable existence [...] In addition, there were constant adventures with starting his own family, which was not an easy matter considering his specific attitude towards women [...] Above all this loomed the threat of war and genocide – Schulz felt it with his sensitive artist intuition"³⁸.

Yes, with the sensitivity of an artist, but not of a man...

Paradoxically, what in a sense made Schulz an artist: his talent, his sensitivity (or even hypersensitivity), fragility, shyness, a specific, perhaps apparent detachment from reality, as well as a deeper view of this reality, somehow deprived him of his masculinity – of course, the one defined and imposed by society – and pushed him into unmanliness. At the same time, however, this unmanliness – perceived from the perspective of the outside world – served as an explanation, a cover and an alibi. This meant that, at least sometimes and at least by some, Schulz was forgiven. Because he was an artist.

What if he was not an artist, but, for example, a shoemaker or, to put it bluntly, a textile merchant? I suspect that then he would have to cope to an even greater extent with these – sometimes unconscious and not directly based on bad intentions – paracastrative reflexes of society, which decide that everything that does not fit into the stereotype of masculinity applicable in a given place and time becomes unmanly. And if it is not masculine, what is it? Maybe spiderly, or maybe cockroachy?

38 Emil Górski's letter to Jerzy Ficowski from November 1982 – "Wspomnienie o Brunonie Schulzu (w 40. rocznicę śmierci)", in: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków*, op. cit.

Stanisław Rosiek: A Cut-off. Seven Fragments

Fragment 1. Foundational self-castration (and its consequences)

“I dream”, writes Schulz in a letter to Stefan Szuman, “that I am in a forest, at night, in the dark, cutting off my penis with a knife, making a hole in the ground and burying it there. This is, as it were, an antecedent, a dream sequence without emotional intonation. The actual dream comes: I come to my senses, I realize the monstrosity, the terribleness of the sin committed. I don’t want to believe that I have committed it, and I still realize with despair that this is the case – what I have done is irrevocable. I am as if already outside of time, facing eternity, which for me will be nothing else than a terrible awareness of guilt, a feeling of irreparable fear for all eternity. I am eternally damned and it looks like I have been locked in a glass jar from which I will never come out. I will never forget this feeling of endless torment, of eternal damnation. How to explain at this age this symbolical charge, this semantic potential of this dream that I have not yet managed to exhaust?”¹.

A strange dream. Difficult to understand and comment on; it is no wonder, therefore, that it is also difficult for the author to “exhaust” it. The account is unverifiable, too: it cannot be ruled out that Schulz confabulates, knowing that the letter was addressed to Stefan Szuman, a professor of psychology at the Jagiellonian University, author of such books as *O psychicznych czynnikach zachowania się w rozwoju dziecka* (1927) and *Analiza formalna i psychologiczna widzeń meskalinowych* (1930). Schulz wanted to interest Szuman. He met him as a lecturer in Żywiec during summer courses for teachers of drawing. At that time, he was still to make his literary debut. He had certain hopes for Szuman. He counted on his help in publishing *The Cinnamon Shops*. Szuman, in turn, was delighted with the manuscript shown to him by Schulz²; in return, he gave him a volume of his (very poor) poems to read. The description of the dream in the letter was a reaction to one of these poems, entitled *Taniec ze sobą samym* [Dancing with Oneself], in which Schulz noticed “the enchantment of one’s own loneliness, cutting oneself off from life, from action,

¹ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, słowo/ obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2016, p. 34–35 (as volume 5 of *Dzieła zebrane*) – emphasis SR. Quotations from this edition are further marked with the abbreviation KL.

² Cf. Szuman’s letter to Ficowski of January 25, 1968 – KL, p. 336.

the pleasure and tragedy of it” that seemed so close to his own experience³. How much truth there was in his confessions, and how much fiction – it is difficult to decide today. But even if the dream described to Szuman – “the most important and the deepest [...], a dream anticipating my fate” – was from the very beginning completely invented, the myth of Schulz’s own beginning constructed in such a way is still worthy of the utmost attention. We are not Freudians, much less Freud himself, to disqualify a conscious, intentional message prepared for use by the recipient. We declare accession to the order of those hermeneuts (that is: suspicious readers) who, without any preliminary assumptions and prejudices, ask about the “symbolic charge” and the “meaningful potential” of the statement. And layer by layer they reveal the meanings hidden in the letter. So let us assume that Schulz consciously wanted others – Szuman and everyone who ever reaches for the letter – to imagine him to be entangled in libido, corporeality, and sexuality in this specific way. Meaning how, exactly?

Michał Paweł Markowski is surprised that “critics rarely refer to this crucial letter”⁴. He is wrong. The dream from the letter to Szuman has been interpreted many times⁵. However, the truth is that no one (not even Paweł Dybel⁶) has conducted a convincing psychoanalysis of Schulz’s dream of self-castration. It would not be easy, anyway. Wojciech Owczarski wisely notes that “the interpretation of this dream – due to the lack of necessary materials in the form of authorial ‘associations’ or comments – seems almost impossible”⁷. I would change “seems” to “is” and “almost” to “absolutely” in this sentence because a message separated – by time and death – from its author, a message deprived of biographical and existential context, cannot and should not be subjected to psychoanalysis. Just the text, the solitary text, has no subconscious of its own (even if it may have its own darkness and depth). The umbilical cord connecting the work of art with “the entirety of our subject matter” – with the “iron capital of the spirit”, of which Schulz wrote that it is “given to us very early in the form of premonitions and semi-conscious experiences”⁸ – is inevitably broken. The desire for origin

³ KL, p. 37.

⁴ M. P. Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiążłość. Schulz, egzystencja, literatura*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2012, p. 79.

⁵ The most extensive, although somewhat meandering, interpretation of this dream was presented by Wojciech Owczarski (*Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora, słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2006). Additionally, attention is paid to sleep by: T. Olchanowski, *Jungowska interpretacja mitu ojca w prozie Brunona Schulza*, Trans Humana, Białystok 2001 (see especially p. 73–76); M. Zaleski, *Masochista na Cyterze*, „Teksty Drugie” 2005, nr 3, p. 184–203.

⁶ Although he had more than one opportunity. For example, in *Seksualność zdegradowana, czyli perwersyjny świat prozy Brunona Schulza*, „Teksty Drugie” 2005, nr 3, p. 204–218.

⁷ W. Owczarski, op. cit., p. 103.

⁸ B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, oprac. J. Jarzębski, wydanie drugie przejrzone i uzupełnione, Ossolineum, Wrocław–Kraków 1998 (BN I, 264), p. 475. Quotations from this edition

(an originary bond with the pre-verbal), a personal anchoring composed of the words of the text – expressed several times by Schulz, who apparently never read Derrida's books – is unrealistic (as we, diligent readers of *Grammatology*, can know very well). There is no return to the origins. Nevertheless, the text is not devoid of its depth, of all that seems to us so dark, indefinite and “subconscious”. The depth of the text is a (secondary) product of the surface – merely a semantic effect of the play on the words of which it is composed.

I think this way because it is inappropriate to do otherwise today. The famous card left by Słowacki no longer sheds tears. However, sometimes I secretly consider a different dynamic of meanings: meanings that are illegally smuggled in, which – in a way imperceptible to the writer – establish some internal dimension of the text, hidden from the writer, not deducible from what the words embedded (like prisoners) legally contribute (mean) in the cells of the language system of life. This hidden dimension of the statement is established by the meanings smuggled into the text, squeezing through the bars – meanings hidden like the Greeks in the Trojan Horse, meanings attached, disordered, not dependent on any systems that, in living speech, or intonation reveals (or rather betrays) his hesitation, suspended voice, uncooperativeness, a sudden acceleration of the pace of speaking, a sudden strengthening of the accent. Unfortunately, the text does not breathe. In search of its hidden internal dimensions (this “depth”), we must therefore read what is unwritten, understand – what has not been articulated or even thought by the writer, but had only the status of these “premonitions and semi-conscious sensations”.

Does the text that is the only reality for us – such as Schulz's letter to Szuman – allow us to do so? Yes, if we assume, following Tadeusz Peiper, that it is a place of self-betrayal. One of Peiper's greatest intuitions is the belief that there is another text hidden beneath the text and that this subcutaneous statement can indeed be read. His exuberant challenge: “Give me three metaphors immediately following each other in a poem, and I will tell you as much about the poet as his most extensive biographer”⁹, announced the possibility of a different semantics – one that allows us to move from the configuration of metaphors not only (and not primarily) to poetics, but to biography – and therefore beyond the text. The arrangement of poetic figures and the relationships between them allow us to reveal the mystery of the poet's soul. So much for Peiper (who, by the way, is worth following further). In addition to the biographical logic of figures, this other kind

are marked with the abbreviation OP. English translations are available in B. Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, London: Penguin Books 2008.

⁹ T. Peiper, *Komizm, dowcip, metafora*, in: idem, *Tędy. Nowe usta, przedmowa, komentarz, nota bibliograficzna* S. Jaworski, opracowanie tekstu T. Podoska, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1972, p. 306.

of semantics should consider the relationship between meaning and counter-meaning, and even the void of meaning, because only then does identification become possible for the universe in which the text resides and, indirectly, the cage of meanings in which the writer was imprisoned.

However, before this new semantics emerges, all we can do is – recognizing the importance of Schulz's letter to Szuman – gradually discover further layers of meaning. And we might very well recognize that the penis cut off by Schulz in his dream and buried in the ground is not a symbol of some hidden content from the psychoanalytic index (e.g. “the sign of the Father”¹⁰ or a symptom of “castration complex, testifying to unresolved conflicts of the Oedipal period”¹¹), but rather that this severed penis is a penis, is a penis, is a penis...

What does it mean (and what are the consequences) when someone – for example Schulz – imaginatively self-castrates himself and communicates it to others? What is the meaning and what are the consequences of this act?

The first semantic reconnaissance starts from an obvious observation that the dream act described by Schulz is a drastic act of the subject against his natural gender. There is nothing positive in this biological mutilation. By getting rid of his penis in a dream, Schulz does not transform into a woman. He places himself outside the gender dichotomy. He is no longer fully a man, but he does not become a woman because of it either. His self-castration can hardly be considered an attempt to achieve androgyny, an archaic formula of divinity, about which Mircea Eliade, worthy of the highest trust in this matter, wrote: “mythical and religious mentality, before it was able to express the concept of divine two-unity in metaphysical (*esse – non esse*) or theological (revealed and unrevealed) terms, first used biological language (hermaphroditism)”¹². While presenting his dream in a letter to Szuman, Schulz speaks in biological language, but it is a negative language. He does not become an androgyne, because to be an androgyne according to the mythological model is to combine male gender (which he attacked by removing his penis) with female sexuality – which remains inaccessible, distant, and unattainable for him. Therefore, “perfection and total integration” are beyond the reach of the (self-)castrato¹³. By cutting off and burying the penis in the hole, Schulz does not achieve divine fullness; he does not overcome the

¹⁰ See, for example, a lecture by Jacques Lacan delivered in 1958 in Berlin, published in *Écrits* (Paris 1966) and translated into English as “The Significance of the Phallus” – chapter 8 in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, with a foreword by Malcolm Bowie, London: Routledge, 2005. Polish translation: idem, “Znaczenie fallusa”, <http://www.fppl.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Znaczenie-Fallusa.pdf> (retrieved: 8.11.2016).

¹¹ T. Olchanowski, op. cit., p. 76.

¹² M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, przekł. Jan Wierusz-Kowalski, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1966, p. 414.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 416.

gender difference in an act of reconciliation but abolishes and nullifies it. He stands beyond gender.

And he pays a high price for it because he deprives himself of the possibility of procreation, which means that he voluntarily excludes himself from the stream of life which – according to Schopenhauer (and numerous successors of his philosophy), the only form of immortality. Self-castration is also a voluntary step out of time, out of history – this is the second discovery. The castrato has no (family) future. The history of a family, even the greatest, inevitably, and irrevocably ends with him. After all, he disqualifies himself from the succession of generations. There is no succession after him, no continuation – and, as it was once said, no progeniture. By depriving himself of his penis in his sleep, Schulz falls out of the tracks of time. The banal linearity of life that we know well and that so often bores us is no longer available to him. As an imaginary castrato, he enters the territory of myth – with its cyclical, its repetition, its eternal present (a good equivalent of which is the film loop that Marek Sobczyk wrote about in his own commentary to his 1986 film *Bruno Schulz obcina i zakopuje penisa w jamce* [Bruno Schulz Cuts off and Buries His Penis in a Hole]¹⁴). Schulz, imaginatively deprived of his penis, moves from history (whose “small” form is his own biography) – to myth. From now on, there is no future for him other than that provided by art and literature. Self-castration from the dream described to Szuman – it is a symbolic act of transference from biological life (and biological eternity) to life in literature and art, from life in the body to life in word (and image).

For Schulz, this transition is a sin – monstrous, terrible, and irrevocable. Terrified by what he did in his dream, he has a “terrible awareness of guilt”. He feels condemned “forever”. And this is “eternal damnation” is a measure of the magnitude of the sin he has just committed.

Fragment 2. Drastic confessions

We all sin. Some less, some more, more willingly and more often – with joyful pleasure, but also with a sense of guilt sometimes. Schulz is not unique in this



14 The painting is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. The website contains the author’s interpretation: “Bruno Schulz in a film montage of two frames, seen at once in the picture: he cuts off and buries his penis in a hole. With this approach, the psychoanalytic aspect, which can be considered through Lacan’s analysis, seems less important (the penis holds a special place in the relationship of pleasure, the erectile organ begins to symbolize the place of pleasure, not as itself, nor even as an image, but as a missing part of the desired image), it becomes more important to go beyond the limitations of film and painting conventions, and ultimately, there is no lack of the desired image but an excess of it. Additionally, a still painting can be viewed for as long as a film, and then you come back to it and watch it again for the same length of time as a film” (<http://artmuseum.pl/pl/kolekcja/praca/sobczyk-marek-bruno-schulz-cuts-off-and-burys-the-penis-in-the-hole>, access: 8/11/2016).

respect. His sinfulness flows into the great river of human sins, the sources of which – as we know – are in Paradise, in original sin.

So why ask about Schulz's sin and not about your own sins? Why deal with this particular sinner and not others if there are so many of them around us? Is there anything special and unique in his sin among all the sins of the world?

Yes, for sure. Schulz is an artist whose sinfulness is the lining to the main fabric of his work and manifests itself openly in graphics and drawings or secretly permeates his prose. One could even say that Schulz-artists arose from sin, from the feeling of being sinful, and – at the same time – guilty, worthy of punishment. And that the artist manages to give the banal sinfulness of each of us an extraordinary rank, exceeding the commonness of everyday straying from the path of virtue controlled by religion, by social custom, and finally by law.

This is not easy. Nothing is more banal than sin. Included in theological categorisations (seven deadly sins, mortal sins, common sins...), and reduced to the confessional, sin does not leave much space to mark individuality and uniqueness. In sin, we are very similar to each other. And you need truly extraordinary skills and inventiveness in breaking prohibitions to cross the triviality (and the herd mechanics) of everyday sinning. Schulz is a master of such transgressions. His drawings from *The Booke of Idolatry* – hundreds of images documenting his sinful actions in one way or another – contain both a symbolic dimension (that is, enabling free movement and taking root in new places), and a metaphysical one (that is, going beyond the immediacy of a biographical event).

Fine, but does the intuitive (and common) interpretation of Schulz's work as sinful get us the right to enter the artist's intimate life?

Let us justify (and argue for) the fact that Schulz himself encourages us to engage in this kind of inappropriate curiosity. "You know," he told Józef Nacht in 1937, "I have always dreamed that my drawings would reach the hands of people who would feel 'their content'"¹⁵. He meant "masochistic" drawings, drawings in which – unlike in prose – his hidden sexual desires came to the fore with full force.

It is hard to count how many times he drew the same scene: himself in an idolatrous pose, above him a naked or half-dressed woman with long legs, sometimes with a whip in her hand. In all the versions and varieties known to us, however, we can easily see an essential common feature: submission, servitude, captivity, devotion, and submission. There is no doubt, according to the psychiatric taxonomy, that they are a manifestation of masochism. If it was difficult for

15 J. Nacht, *Wywiad drastyczny. (Rozmowa z Brunonem Schulzem)*, "Nasza Opinia" 1937, nr 77, p. 5; quoted after: *Czytanie Schulza. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej "Bruno Schulz – w stulecie urodzin i pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci"*, Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, 8–10 czerwca 1992, pod red. J. Jarzębskiego, T.I.C., Kraków 1994, p. 106.

Ficowski to use this elegant and useful term (introduced by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his pioneering work *Psychopathia Sexualis. Eine klinisch-forensische Studie* of 1886) when referring to Schulz, today no one seems to have any problems with making a psychiatric diagnosis. Recently, Marta Konarzewska formulated it in this straightforward way: “It does not take much to see masochism in the works of the Drohobych artist. It is just there – on the surface and underneath. If it is not the subject matter, it is the logic of presentation”¹⁶. This type of certainty is the result of numerous statements from the a masochistic tradition of reading Schulz. Artur Sandauer, Janis Augsburg, Marek Zaleski, Agata Araszkiwicz and many others certainly contributed to it. However, at the beginning of this tradition stands Schulz himself – not only as a visual artist, but also as an interpreter of his work (and of himself). In an interview with Nacht, he revealed his deepest desires directly: “The whole world lives only to rule or to endure domination. There are rulers and slaves everywhere. Already in my early youth, I caught myself having terrible thoughts that I would like my mother to die and myself to have a stepmother. And I said to myself: God! How was it possible to want something like that! But I couldn’t shake the thoughts away. The triumph of a woman gave me painful pleasure”¹⁷.

How much is this drastic confession worth? Not much for Ficowski, since he warns readers against Nacht’s interview: “The scandalous and posturing tone of the *Interview* conducted by an inexperienced debutante, the shallowness and simplistic inclination of the text make it necessary for us to treat it with caution, and not to trust it too much”¹⁸. But even he, the author *Regions of the Great Heresy*, which read as a highly spiritual text, admits that in this strange, peculiar interview there is “some information that seems factual”¹⁹. This applies primarily to the declaration about the difference between writing and drawing. It is not just about the “tighter boundaries” that drawing sets for expression compared to prose²⁰. Schulz drew attention to them in an interview with Witkacy. In an interview with Nacht, in turn, he imposed a web of shame and openness on his work: “I wouldn’t be able to write a masochistic novel. I would be ashamed anyway, too”²¹. I do not feel that shame is present in his drawings. He is shameless in them – that is,

16 M. Konarzewska, *On tylko udaje tak? Schulz i Gombrowicza zabawa w doktorowq*, in: Schulz. *Przewodnik “Krytyki Politycznej”*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2012, p. 91.

17 J. Nacht, op. cit.

18 Cf. *Komentarze i glosy*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga obrazów*, zebrał, oprac. i komentarzami opatrzył J. Ficowski, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2015, p.-. 520.

19 Ibidem.

20 Cf. Schulz’s answer to Witkacy’s question, which was: “Does the same thread appear in the drawings as in the prose?” (OP, p. 475–476).

21 J. Nacht, op. cit.

literal and bold, precisely establishing the directions of interpersonal relations and sketching an image of events.

Fragment 3. Shame and the fissures of literary discourse

It is hard to deny it. In the stories, the author of *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* – indeed – does not allow his own sexuality to come to light. When he writes, shame turns on the mechanism of self-censorship. It permeates Schulz's entire literary work. Generally, this peculiar *pudor poetae* flows in an underground stream. It is like a dark river of shame that takes its source in the subconscious. But it happens that the mechanisms of self-censorship hidden by the writer himself organize (and captivate) the surface of literary discourse. In such cases, we can be sure that Schulz carelessly entered the zone of secrets of his sinful body.

However, the matter does not lend itself easily to simple interpretations. Schulz's prose is not devoid of eroticism – and sometimes very drastic²² instances of it. Self-censorship is activated selectively. Generally, the writer has no problem with the sexuality of his characters. Already in the first story of *The Street of Crocodiles*, he presents a gallery of characters whose sexuality is explicit, ostentatious – sometimes even drastically exposed. Among those characters – let us recall the most important ones – there is the animalistic (and semi-divine) Touya, who “hoarse with shouting, convulsed with madness, presses her fleshy belly in an excess of lust against the trunk of an elder” (and the trunk “groans softly under the insistent pressure of that libidinous passion”), and next to her is Łucja, “her flesh white and delicate”, who burns for any reason, thus revealing her “most sensitive maidenhood”; there is cousin Emil, with barely visible, “used up” libido, capable only of passive contact with pornographic photographs, with which he initiates the boyish narrator, and further, in another story, there is the dissolute uncle Charles, “a grass widower [...] battered and bruised by the nightly revels”. In *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, there are characters with clearly defined profiles: the fetishist Szloma (stealing Adela's shoes, dress and beads), the cripple Eddie with “completely degenerate and shapeless” legs, deprived of his crutches by his parents, crawling up the stairs to peek at Adela sleeping at night through the window, and finally Adela herself, radiating sexuality in all directions, and her games with shop assistants...

Is that not enough? As you can see, the sexual life in Schulz's prose is not that bad. Self-censorship (i.e. the feeling of sin and shame) comes to light only

²² I have always wondered how the episode with Touya is discussed in school lessons. There are few such drastic scenes in Polish literature.

when Schulz comes dangerously close to his own (vicious) desires. In fiction, he never states them directly. He seems to share them to a considerable extent with Jacob, his literary father, who in this respect can be considered the author's erotic *porte parole*, who in turn is presented in most of the stories as a boy whose sexuality is not yet defined, therefore passive, condemned to observing other people's sexuality.

In the subsequent instalments of the micro-series of stories beginning with "The Treatise on Tailors' Dummies", there is a game between what is presented in the literary discourse and what is hidden in understatements and silences. It seems there is no other way. In order to locate and describe this series of understatements and omissions, one must go through the trail of narrated events – already traversed so many times by the inter pretor of Schulz's fiction. So here are femdom scenes once again – increasingly drastic ones, too.

The "triumphant woman", the cause of "painful pleasure", is Adela herself. The subject of her actions is the Father. In "Tailors' Dummies" the dominance of the maid still takes on an innocent form: "She walked up to Father with a smile and flipped him on the nose". And that is all for now. The censorship mechanism is not active just yet.

In "A Treatise on Tailors' Dummies", Adela goes much further: "She then moved her chair forward and, without getting up from it, lifted her dress to reveal her foot tightly covered in black silk, and then stretched it out stiffly like a serpent's head. [...]. My father rose slowly, still looking down, took a step forward like an automaton, and fell to his knees. The lamp hissed in the silence of the room, eloquent looks ran up and down in the thicket of wallpaper patterns, whispers of venomous tongues floated in the air, zigzags of thought". This is where the narration and the short story break off. Schulz ends it with three periods. The rest is left unsaid. It is a narrative understatement.

In the next part of the series – titled "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies. Continuation" – Adela intensifies her forms of domination ("Adela rose from her chair and asked us to avert our eyes from what was to follow. Then she went up to Father and, with her hands on her hips in a pose of great determination, she spoke very clearly"). The feeling of shame and sinfulness increases. Schulz, the writer, finds a stronger form of typographic silence here – more capacious than ellipsis. In the first printed edition the passage is followed by two lines filled with hyphens. They conceal some event. Something is certainly happening – but what? It is not known exactly. Just in case, I will quote that passage:

— — — — —
 — — — — —

The story ends with the sentence: "The two other girls sat stiffly, with downcast eyes, strangely numb..."

What hides in the cracks of Schulz's literary discourse? What is there beyond the border of shame (and therefore sin), which the writer approaches but does not cross in his writing? We are not the girls from "A Treatise on Tailors' Dummies". It is high time to shake off the numbness, raise your eyes and then describe in your own words exactly what the writer censored in his stories – what he left silent.

Fragment 4. The shamelessness of drawing

What should not be written about can be drawn. We already know this rule. In the cracks that appear in Schulz's prose every now and again, there are hidden passages to the worlds drawn by the writer. Let us follow this lead and see what the author of *The Street of Crocodiles* could not write and therefore had to draw. We enter a different world – a world of images that seem sinless at first. Shame loses its intensity and strength there. Fear and guilt disappear. For Schulz, drawing is a sphere of unrestricted freedom.

It was like that already in childhood. Schulz describes the first age of drawing in *The Age of Genius*: "It was a drawing full of cruelty, ambushes, and attacks. [...] It was a murderous hunt, a fight to the death" (134). The world – given to the draftsman as a vision, as a "flood of images" – then passed through his hands "to be renewed" (141). The artist, however, had serious doubts whether he was really the author of his drawings. "Sometimes", he told Szlomo before he stole Adela's shoes, "they seem to me like an involuntary plagiarism, something that was suggested to me, suggested to me... As if something foreign had used my inspiration for purposes unknown to me" (142). Traces of this type of drawings (originary or ontological) can be found today in the so-called "adolescent sketchbook", in which Schulz drew – just like in *The Age of Genius* – "in a hurry, in panic, across, diagonally, through printed and written pages" (133). Another kind of drawing would not start until a few years later²³.

Schulz was no longer a child then. He was living the third decade of his life. He had spent years in Vienna, where he attended painting and drawing classes at the Academy of Art. During this time, he made the following drawings: *Scene on the Terrace Stairs*, *Playful Women* (1916), *Sadistic Women* (1919), *Bacchanalia*, *Woman with a Whip*, *Naked Man at the Feet of a Naked Woman* (1920), *Self-Portrait with Two Naked models and Stanislaw Weingarten*, *Feast of Idolaters* (1921), *Idolaters Before Two Women* (1922). These are not "anagrams of visions" or "rebuses of luminous revelations" sent by God. Schulz's drawings and works from this non-genius era do not represent the external world, but the phantasmal internal one. The

²³ Cf. M. Kitowska-Łysiak, *Uwagi w sprawie kanonu. Brunona Schulza szkicownik młodzieńczy i freski w willi Landaua*, "Schulz/Forum" 2, 2013, p. 63–78.

direction of inspiration changes. The luminous pillar disappears, the glow fades, the brightness of the world disperses. Schulz does not draw “blinded by the light, with eyes full of explosions, rockets and colours”. His gaze turned inward and plunged into darkness. He looked inside himself without fear, with considerable courage or even with some bravado. And he drew what he saw without shame. He communicated it to the world – with pride? With relief? With triumph? Because there was no shame.

How to understand these drawings and graphics? How to fulfil the author’s instructions and “feel their content”? You certainly should not start by placing Schulz’s “dark” works in any larger art tradition, nor should you perceive them as deriving from an era defined by Rodin, Kubin and Schiele on the one hand, and by surrealists and artists from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* circle on the other. Rather, they need to be embedded in desires²⁴ that made them come into being. Multiplication of references to old and new art will at most allow you to understand and describe the language Schulz used to articulate his hidden “I”.

Adolf Bienenstock already noticed this when he wrote in 1922 about the works exhibited by Schulz in Lviv: “The figures, landscape, architecture, and even the secondary accessories of these compositions – these are the inventively processed elements of works from earlier or newer eras (rococo, Goya, Rops). Schulz uses these elements as permanent, universally understandable signs to express his intense experiences and fantastic dreams”²⁵. In general, the first commentators of the writer’s later visual works most often understood his position in art: his rooting in tradition – and at the same time his loneliness, strangeness, uniqueness. “He is so different from others – wrote Aleksander Stewe – so possessed by visions of his own unbridled fantasy and such an extraordinary phenomenon in contemporary Polish art that he stands alone both



24 There is nothing to hide. I am referring here to Freud’s interpretation from years ago which was discussed by Paul Ricoeur in his book *Le conflit des interprétations* (1969). The essay *Wyzwanie semiologiczne. Problem podmiotu* in Ewa Bieńkowska’s translation (and edited by Stanisław Cichowicz) was published in my youth (in the collection *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie*, Pax, Warszawa 1975) and since then the theses presented in it have always accompanied me as a frame of reference. Today, many of them have become obvious. “Before the subject establishes itself consciously and voluntarily, it is already established in being at the level of drives” (p. 197). This sentence could be a motto of my article. I would like to remind you of Ricoeur’s thesis about the “primitiveness” and the “archaism” of desire, because it is often forgotten in the interpretations of literature and art (or rejected as a manifestation of new naturalism). Meanwhile, the desire – better or worse realized by the subject – inevitably becomes visible in the acts of his artistic expression. This happens even when artistic activities are understood as a pure play of conventions.

25 A. Bienenstock, *Z wystawy wiosennej. Prace graficzne Brunona Schulza, “Chwila” (Lwów) 1922*, nr 1213, p. 5.

at this exhibition and among contemporary painters”²⁶. The quoted fragment comes from a review of an exhibition by several young artists organized in May 1921. Where? In the auditorium of the Drohobych high school!

Schulz was seen by early reviewers as a master of form, but of a ready-made, solidified one. His works revealed “an outstanding graphic talent”. The author of this opinion, Bienenstock, himself a painter, listed (enviously?) the advantages of Schulz’s drawings: “The ease of capturing the forms of the human body, the ornamental fluidity of the lines, the decorative flair in the composition of groups and the distribution of chiaroscuro”, but at the same time notes that Schulz’s professional skill and ease of drawing lead him astray. “His works have too much technical finitude”, he wrote. According to the reviewer, Schulz did not work on means of artistic expression. He did not seek “a specific form as a sensual equivalent of internal mental states”. He was satisfied with the effect achieved thanks to talent. And yet – the reviewer seemed to have no doubts when he concluded – “A person with a certain artistic culture is looking for something more in these works than a visual realization of erotic dreams”²⁷. What exactly? He looked for form and aesthetic experiences.

The first reviewers and critics correctly identified the masochistic theme of Schulz’s drawings and prints. Generally, they quickly got over the issue of Schulz’s form and its originality or innovation, which – incidentally – is important because it places the artist outside the history of art, outside aesthetics. The first reactions to Schulz’s drawings and graphics were attempts – sometimes less, sometimes more successful – to “feel their content”. Here are a few examples, revealing varying degrees of approval (or, more often, disapproval) for the discovered (“felt”) content:

S. N-owa: “At the feet of [...] women crawl men, of whose twisted faces reflect all the ugliness and destruction of the world of the senses. [...] There is no joy of life in any of these seen figures, there is only the desire to lose oneself, and

26 A. Stewe, *Z wystawy obrazów, “Świt”* 1921, nr 11, p. 6–7. The biweekly, published in the early 1920s, was “the organ of oil officials in Borysław”. Artur Lauterbach wrote in a similar vein: “It was intended to derive Bruno Schulz’s [sic!] work from Rops, Lautrec or Goya, but in my opinion such parallels fail to make sense” (*Talent w ukryciu. O grafikach Brunona Schulca, “Chwila”* (Lwów) 1929, nr 3740, p. 5), as well as Maksymilian Goldstein and Karol Dresdner: “The art of Bruno Schulz has often been compared with Goya’s ghostly graphics or Rops’s macabre pornography. Analogies are unnecessary here. Schulz has his own artistic worldview and original logic of creativity” – *Kultura i sztuka ludu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich. Zbiory Maksymiljana Goldsteina*, Lwów 1935, p. 97–98.

27 A similar opinion about Schulz was expressed by Artur Lauterbach after a few years: “An excellent draftsman and one of the best graphic designers in Poland, he is not tempted by technical innovation or extreme flamboyance of forms; simple and unpretentious in artistic means, Schulz knows how to conjure up a magical atmosphere of vision, knows how to attract and enchant with the depth of thought and the power of feeling” (“Chwila” (Lviv) 1930, no. 4005, p. 7).



Woman with a Whip and Three Naked Men,
1920, watercolour, gouache, 25.5 × 25, Museum of Literature in Warsaw



Procession, from **The Booke of Idolatry**
series, 1920–1922, cliché-verre, 17 × 23



Spring Festival (Spring), from **The Booke of Idolatry series**, 1920–1922, cliché-verre, 11.6 × 17

despite the forced self-awareness, their movements reveal uncertainty through the narcosis of promiscuous pleasure”²⁸.

Artur Lauterbach: “Sick Eros, paid tribute to inhuman torment, crushed under the merciless yoke of the primal instincts of the hostile sex, submits the burnt offering of his beating heart at her feet”²⁹.

A much later statement (the last in this sequence), comes from a strange pair of authors – collector Maksymilian Goldstein and doctor Karol Dresdner – in a book describing the former’s collections: “The demonic power of the female sex sometimes enters the sphere of perversions: in several drawings, we can see sadistic women tormenting a fan who wants to be hit”³⁰.

Fragment 5. Emblems of masochism. Compulsiveness

It was not without reason that the first reviewers noticed the perfection of the drawings and the artist’s excellent mastery of technique. In this period, Schulz draws perfectly: with a steady hand, without franticness, hesitation, or dilemmas. Fully defined forms and human figures emerge from the darkness. As if he was standing on the border of a frozen world that spreads not in front of him, but within him. And he only recreates static and motionless images, reminiscent of the nineteenth-century practice of presenting scenes taken from great literature in the theatre, which, despite the evidence of the eyes were called “living images”³¹. Masochistic theatre? Certainly. Scenes of subjugation and idolatry congeal into emblems – emblems of masochism. The drawn characters play the roles assigned to them by Schulz with all the alacrity they can muster. One of these figures is Schulz himself. He presents himself as a servant to a woman – as an idolater, as a masochist bowing his head humbly in the face of a force greater than himself.

From 1920 to 1922, probably in Drohobych, he made a series of drawings that are now part of *The Booke of Idolatry*. The drawings present scenes in which Schulz once again casts himself as a follower of a secret cult of a beautiful and domineering woman. We can easily find him in many a procession of idolaters. His head with this tongue out approaches the shoe of a woman sitting on a chair (on a throne!) and holding a whip in her hand. Just a moment and he will use it. Could this (perhaps the most drastic) drawing of the entire series become an

²⁸ S. N-owa, *Wrażenia z wystawy (wystawa obrazów Schulza), “Świt” 1921*, nr 6, p. 2–3.

²⁹ *Talent w ukryciu. O grafikach Brunona Schulca, “Chwila” (Lwów) 1929*, nr 3740, p. 5.

³⁰ M. Goldstein, K. Dresdner, *Kultura i sztuka ludu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich. Zbiory Maksymiljana Goldsteina*, Lwów 1935, p. 97–98.

³¹ See Małgorzata Komza’s excellent book on this topic *Żywe obrazy. Między sceną, obrazem i książką* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995), which talks about, among other things, the crypto-erotic nature of living images (p. 118–119).

illustration for the scene with Adela and the father? It is difficult to guess. The girls who witnessed it all were sitting – let me remind you – “stiffly with their eyes downcast, strangely numb...” They saw nothing. They will not tell us anything.

Establishing a chronology in the case of Schulz’s visual works is usually impossible, and almost always uncertain. It is also difficult to determine what part of his legacy has survived. Therefore, we establish internal boundaries for a fragmentary work, based on accidentally preserved works that do not form a clear course of his oeuvre. However, there is no other option. We are doomed to more or less uncertain hypotheses and intuitive diagnoses³². One caesura does not raise any doubts. Most of the 1930s drawings we know today, though filled with eroticism, and focused around the same, masochistic theme, seem different from the erotic emblems of *The Booke of Idolatry* and drawings from the second decade. Generally, these are actually sketches, drawing notes, at most preparatory studies for future work. They have no finish, no signature – they seem to have stopped half-step before artistic finality, as if they still belonged to the artist rather than to the potential audience. It is significant that Schulz did not show these sketches at exhibitions. However, he must have attached considerable value to them, since in 1942, in a situation of immediate threat to his life, he entrusted them to Aryan depositories, who had a greater chance of survival. He must have wanted these hasty sketches to live longer than he did.

Schulz documents his sinful falls – in nearly a hundred surviving drawings he deals with the same topic in several shots. No longer a theatre of passion, masochism shackled by conventions, but a desires freed from the rigour of form. The lines in these drawings are different: what is striking is the lack of care for the material (usually shreds of very poor paper, pencil, less often crayon, and exceptionally pen and ink). In these sketches you can see haste, feverishness – who knows, maybe it is even compulsiveness, a compulsion to draw that is difficult to control. It was similar in the mythologized childhood of the age of genius. But there the images came from outside. It was similar in the age of idolatry – only that the projection of phantasms contained a clear distance between the drawer and the drawing (finished, framed, donated or sold, hung on the wall) or the graphics developed from scratched plates in a photographic darkroom, and then placed in various configurations in the files. Now – in the age of compulsive drawing – Schulz reduces distance. You get the impression that his hand never leaves paper. The drawn scene is not given from the outside (as in the flood of images in *The Age of Genius*), it is not a projection of the interior (as in *The Booke*

32 I wrote about the good and bad consequences of such a situation in the essay *Dlaczego dzisiaj nadal czytamy Schulza?* in: *Bruno Schulz jako filozof i teoretyk literatury*. Materiały V Międzynarodowego Festiwalu Brunona Schulza w Drohobyczu, pod red. W. Meniok, Drohobycz 2014, p. 96–116.

of *Idolatry*), but it only happens in the process of drawing, it is only then that it takes on a special reality – tangible, accessible at the tip of a pencil. In the act of drawing, the boundary between fantasy and reality blurs. It is no longer an (artistic) projection of dark desires that flow (as they want) from the depths of the “I” of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry* and are revealed in the visible world thanks to the signs found in circulation. The moment the pencil touches the paper, hasty masochistic sketches become for Schulz what they represent. Just like animals in the age of genius that the artist brought into existence. There is a certain kind of finality in such (establishing, ontological) drawing – a fulfilment that is not, however, substitutive or compensatory, because it does not assume any reality as its precondition.

For Schulz, what is drawn is what is drawn. It does not aspire to be a representation of events that did not come to pass, nor a sublimation of the artist’s dark sexual desires.

There is, of course, no evidence that this was the case. I am just offering some risky guesses here (which are all perhaps too bold). The artist rarely spoke about his sketches from the 1930s. There is only the testimony of a “second person”, given by Tadeusz Lubowiecki (Izydor Friedman), Schulz’s friend from the last years of his life, who wrote in a 1947 letter to Jerzy Ficowski: “He [Schulz] told me that when he is overcome with lust, then instead of going to the girl, he draws and finds sexual satisfaction in it”. This is followed by a comment: “I have the impression that it was a habitual response to his extreme shyness. Hence my term ‘sublimation’”³³.

Lubowiecki is, as you can see, a diligent student of Freud. He sees something like substitute gratification in Schulz’s compulsive drawing: compensation and sublimation (or vice versa). Perhaps his testimony is true – and his diagnosis accurate. Perhaps Schulz was satisfied with this form of masochistic fulfilment. And perhaps the fulfilment was full. Even the multitude and endless repetition of drawing acts do not deny such a hypothesis. On the contrary. A sketch – just like a sexual act – produces short-term gratification. Desire is renewed quickly. As if satisfaction could never be complete. And that is why it demands endless repetition. Schulz reaches for another sheet of paper. He looks around. He finally finds a pencil. He draws the first, hasty lines. While drawing, he enters the room where a beautiful, merciless lady is resting on the sofa. He falls on his knees before her. He bows his head...

This is what it could have looked like. And if so, did Schulz really find sexual fulfilment in such events, which were unattainable for him in the real world? I think not.



33 Letter from Tadeusz Lubowiecki to Jerzy Ficowski .



Fragment 6. In the procession of perversions

Schulz is not a child of Cain. He does not follow the path of crime. He does not stand up to life, even though he himself does not want to take part in its reconstruction. He affirms it in all its manifestations, even going as far as – as the sentimental legend would have it – to feed flies with sugar³⁴. Schulz's sins are the sins of the flesh. Of the two basic types of sinfulness – related to death and killing on the one hand, and to life and fertility on the other – Schulz chooses (?) the latter. His unshakable reliance on the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” is beyond doubt. In the world of his fiction (and in the world of drawings), death is on the defensive. It is an altogether different story with commandments related to the body and it's the purpose they set for it. Sinful aberrations are in abundance here. As a visual artist, Schulz denounced himself. He was a great sinner – notorious and shameless. He was a man who did not seek to procreate. He wanted to be dominated by a woman. He could not hide it. He was a “masochist”. What did it mean? Who was a masochist?

We should first ask: who was the masochist in Schulz's times (when he himself “was a masochist”)? Or more precisely: what did it mean to be a masochist between two great wars – not only in Europe, in Paris or Berlin, but also in Warsaw, Zakopane, Drohobych?

When looking for answers to these questions, we should first recall the “God-fearing gossips of Saint Vincent de Paul” from the book by Andrzej Chciuk, a resident of Drohobych. We should also refer to the “pity for the pervert” felt by the prostitute allegedly reading *The Street of Crocodiles*³⁵. The words of “the doctor's wife from Wilcza” (invented by Witold Gombrowicz, but nevertheless worthy of attention), according to whom Schulz was “either a sick pervert or a poseur”³⁶. These statements fall within the horizon of a period in which both scolding and moralistic reprimands were often accompanied by various forms of understanding consent, sometimes taking the form of pity. After all, even Krafft-Ebing had already absolved Sacher-Masoch in a way, writing that the latter “suffered from an anomaly in his sexual feelings through no fault of his own”³⁷. Later, the process of relativizing the border between norm and deviation begins. For example, Dr. Pierre Vachet, a French sexologist, following in the footsteps of Freud, expressed the opinion in a book widely read in Europe, the

34 David Grosman talked about it in his novel *See Under: Love*, transl. B. Rosenberg, p. 130.

35 A. Chciuk, *Atlantyda. Opowieść o Wielkim Księstwie Bałaku*, LTW, Łomianki 2015, p. 63; idem, *Ziemia księżycowa. Druga opowieść o Księstwie Bałaku*, Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, Londyn 1972, p. 79.

36 W. Gombrowicz, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio” 1936, nr 7.

37 R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis. Eine Klinisch-Forensische Studie* (1886).



Woman with a Whip and a Man Dodging a Blow, before 1933, pencil, 13 × 16.5, Museum of Literature in Warsaw
previous page: **Beasts**, from **The Booke of Idolatry series**, 1920–1922, cliché-verre, 22.5 × 17

Polish translation of which was published in Lviv in 1928: “in normal people, especially women, we often encounter [...] a drive towards humiliation and physical suffering”³⁸. But this contemporary of Schulz did not express views that were universally accepted at that time. Even in the case of the permissive author of *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, the masochist, caught up in a game with himself and with the discursive pressures of the age (from moral to scientific), follows in “a long succession of abnormal individuals whose sexual activities are more and more alien to what seems desirable to the sensible person”³⁹. All these “abnormal individuals” remind Freud of the grotesque monsters from Breughel’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. They make him afraid. “This ill-assorted array”, he explains in *The Introduction to Psychoanalysis* published at the time when Schulz was drawing *Sadistic Women*, “fairly clamors for orderly classification if it is not to bewilder our senses”⁴⁰. So let us sort it out! In the first group of “abnormal individuals”, Freud places those who “have dispensed with the mutual union of the genital organs”, then those who are most sexually excited by “the functions of excretion”. Next come those “others who have relinquished the genitals entirely as an objective, have raised another part of the body to serve as the goal of their desire; the woman’s breast, the foot, the tress of hair. There are also the fetishists, to whom the body part means nothing, who are gratified by a garment, a piece of white linen, a shoe”⁴¹. The procession ends with the most disgusting individuals, for whom the sexual object must “become a defenceless corpse”.

“But enough of these horrors!” – let us repeat after Freud, and look at the second group with some caution. It is opened by voyeurs and exhibitionists. “Here also belong the enigmatic sadists, whose affectionate strivings know no other goal than to cause their object pain and agony, varying all the way from humiliating suggestions to the harshest physical ill-treatment. As if to balance the scale, we have on the other hand the masochists, whose sole satisfaction consists in suffering every variety of humiliation and torture, symbolic and real, at the hands of the beloved one”⁴².

According to the testimony that Schulz – while drawing – left for us to interpret, his face could appear twice in this procession of perversions. First, when fetishists passed by, and later when masochists appeared. Freud is an external observer to all of them. For “normal” listeners of his lectures (and for us who are not keen on the procession of perversions), he prepared a comfortable,

38 P. Vachet, *Niepokój płciowy (L'inquiétude sexuelle, 1927)*, przeł. K. Rychłowski, Ateneum, Warszawa–Lwów 1928, p. 86.

39 S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, G. Stanley Hall, Project Gutenberg.

40 Ibidem.

41 Ibidem.

42 Ibidem.

secure place next to himself. However, there is no morality in his condemnation of “abnormal individuals” (at most, there is disgust and aversion when he notices “the absurdities, caprices and horrors” that are “magnified to the disreputable”⁴³). At a critical point in the lecture, he poses a key question: “Ladies and gentlemen, what attitude are we to assume to these unusual varieties of sex gratification?”. And he replies: “Nothing at all is achieved by the mere expression of indignation and personal disgust and by the assurance that we do not share these lusts. [...] If we fail to understand these abnormal manifestations of sexuality and are unable to relate them to the normal sexual life, then we cannot understand normal sexuality. It is, in short, our unavoidable task to account theoretically for all the potentialities of the perversions we have gone over and to explain their relation to the so-called normal sexuality”⁴⁴. Later, he completes the argument: “Rarely is normal sex-life entirely free from one or another of the perverse traits”⁴⁵.

Schulz knew Freud’s concepts. Traces of Freud’s books can be found in essays and reviews Schulz wrote for “Wiadomości Literackie” or “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”. He may have even met Freud in person during his stay in Vienna, he might have listened to his lectures. For a while he lived a few minutes away from the psychoanalyst’s office⁴⁶. However, it is doubtful whether Freud’s relativization of the sexual norm gave hope to the sinner from Drohobych. One may get the impression that Schulz did not need, and therefore did not seek, absolution or justification. The repetition and ostentation of presenting his image in visual masochistic scenes leads us to see him as someone who walks in a procession of perversions with a kind of proud heroism, with his face uncovered. Much of his work depicts idolatrous scenes in which Schulz – as an icon of himself – plays the main role. No camouflage, no dodging. Schulz, the visual artist, circulates countless testimonies of his masochistic mode of existence.

Does he want to redefine what is human in this way? Does he demand recognition of his sinful nature?

As a masochist (and an artist at the same time), Schulz had a major advantage over Freud. Freud, and before that Krafft-Ebing and other professional psychiatrists, were all confined to the testimonies of their patients, in accordance with which they established their views on masochism. Schulz was not limited in that way. *The Booke of Idolatry* and his compulsive drawing sketches of the 1930s originate in the very centre of perversion. They are not illustrations. In particular,

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 306–307.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 320.

⁴⁶ Which is what Joanna Sass found during her research in Vienna.

they are not illustrations to *Venus in Furs* by Sacher-Masoch⁴⁷, which Schulz seems to have sometimes said himself in a defensive rhetorical act; instead, they are a masochistic expression of their very author. For Schulz, masochism (as practiced in his multiple idolatry scenes) was not an artistic theme taken over from tradition or other artists, such as Rops or Klinger. Instead, it was a personal confession, engaging the deepest layers of his “I” and bringing out these “dark fluids” that he wrote about in the interview with Witkacy⁴⁸.

Schulz did not say much about it. Therefore, when taking up the topic of masochism, which, who knows, may not be fundamental to understanding the work of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry* (but also his biography, embeddedness in existence), we have to limit ourselves to guesswork and speculation. Luck is rare – but we might enjoy it sometimes. Especially if we help it a little.

When I was writing these words, I thought it was worth finally reaching out to the article from 1946, published in “Psychoanalytic Review” under the title “Masochistic Motives in the Literary and Graphic Art of Bruno Schulz”. The author of the text was Henry J. Wegrocki, a doctor of psychiatry, who for two years, between 1933 and 1935, stayed in Warsaw during his scholarship and there he probably came into contact with Schulz’s work and – as the article suggests – also with the author himself. At Wegrocki’s request, the author of *The Street of Crocodiles*, pointing to the importance of the image of “a cab with burning lamps, pulled by a gaunt horse, leaving a dark forest”⁴⁹, hurriedly sketched it for him (a reproduction of this drawing was attached to the article)⁵⁰. Schulz must have known the young psychiatrist’s opinion about his work, perhaps he had even read some preliminary version of his article – he referred to it anyway in the letter, a fragment of which was quoted by Wegrocki in a footnote. It sounds like this: “My creativeness differs in this respect from the stereotyped perverts like Sacher Masoch or de Sade that it is not exhausted by simple reference to some conventional label. It doesn’t represent direct imaginative satisfaction of a perverse drive but reflects rather my entire inner life, the focal center of which

47 Once and for all, the stubbornly proclaimed thesis that the drawings from *The Booke of Idolatry* are illustrations to *Venus in Furs* by Sacher-Masoch. This thesis was understood as a convenient camouflage – but is untenable as an interpretative directive. One can somehow excuse Serge Fauchereau, who, in a book presenting Schulz’s work to the French audience, takes this directive at face value (*Le livre idolatre de Bruno Schulz*, Denoël, Paris 2004). A Polish interpreter who has works by Ficowski or Kitowska-Lysiak at hand cannot be excused, though, when she repeats the opinion about the illustrative nature of Schulz’s drawings (cf. M. Konarzewska, op. cit., p. 92, footnote 8).

48 KL, p. 107.

49 H. J. Wegrocki, *Masochistic Motives in the Literary and Graphic Art of Bruno Schulz*, “The Psychoanalytic Review” 1946, no. 33, p. 154–164.

50 The drawing must be included on the list of Schulz’s sought-after works. Perhaps it is in Wegrocki’s archive.

is formed about a certain perversion. Creatively, I express this perversion in its loftiest, philosophically interpreted form as a foundation determining the total *Weltanschauung* of an individual in all its ramifications”⁵¹.

It would be good to know the whole letter⁵², from which the quoted fragment comes. It would be even better if you could read it in the original but this fragment, mediated by a double translation, is of incredible importance. This is a confession made by a mature man and a mature artist who already knows himself and his situation – in the body, in the real world, but also in the imaginary world. His work grows from the deepest layers of “I”, which – I would like to point this out – was formed under the influence of “deviation from the norm”. Schulz accepts this abnormality because he founded his worldview on it. But also because his entire work grows from it.

Coming into this world after the revelations of the Romantics who often followed the dark paths of madness, after the scandals of naturalistic theories linking genius with madness, after the discoveries of psychoanalysis – Schulz goes a step further. Unlike Freud, he combines sexuality with artistic expression (and worldview). It seems that Wegrocki, a committed psychoanalyst – did not understand very well what Schulz was saying to him and what he had confessed to him in the letter. In the presented self-analysis, sexual compensation is categorically rejected by the artist, and yet in the conclusion of his article, Wegrocki reduces Schulz to psychoanalytical scheme, writing that his artistic production “permits him a vicarious satisfaction of his masochistic tendencies without an accompanying unpleasantness”⁵³. As if we were reading Freud’s famous “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” – which has, perhaps, led everyone astray for over a hundred years. Wegrocki probably did not hear about the scandal that broke out in Truskavets after a senator, visiting the spa on vacation, accidentally came across an exhibition of Schulz’s works and demanded it to be immediately closed. This sensational and – from today’s point of view – colourful event in the biography of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry* was rather dangerous to him at that stage of his life (when he was a beginner teacher of drawing in Drohobych). It could have ruined his teaching career. By deciding to exhibit and later publish his masochistic paintings in magazines and books, Schulz was leaving his “safe haven”. He revealed himself, exposed himself to the attacks from the outside – as a punishment for sin.

51 Wegrocki, p. 164. I would like to draw attention of translation specialists researching the history of Schulz’s presence in English to extensive fragments of his fiction, which Wegrocki quoted in his article in his own translation. These are probably the first attempts to present Schulz in the English language.

52 It is worth searching and determining whether this letter or perhaps other letters have been preserved in the Wegrocki’s archives – perhaps next to the drawing of a cab?

53 *Ibidem*, p. 164.

Fragment 7. Scenes from the life of a teacher of drawing from Drohobych

Schulz the masochist was not stigmatized by the community in which he lived, even though he often had to feel its watchful eye over him. In moral terms, the teacher of the Drohobych high school did not raise any objections among his contemporaries. In the eyes of the society, he was sinless. This is evidenced by a note prepared on November 15, 1924 by the police at the request of the Lviv School District Board in August of that year. It reads: “After investigations by the leader Jana Siara, it is reported that Bruno Schulz, who lives in ul. Floriańska 10 in Drohobych, behaves both politically and morally without reproach and enjoys a good reputation among the local junior high school professors”⁵⁴. The note was signed by the head of the police station (name illegible).

Efforts by education authorities to obtain this type of opinion before hiring a teacher at a school were not unusual. Therefore, no special procedure was applied to Schulz. In accordance with applicable regulations, leader Siara inquired about Schulz in his environment. As you can see, the artistic work of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*, which was already known to some at that time thanks to exhibitions⁵⁵, did not negatively affect his reputation. On September 3, 1924, he started working at the junior high school as a teacher of drawing. Even the subsequent scandal caused by his “pornographic” (a term used by a Christian Democracy senator) drawings exhibited a few years later in the Spa House in Truskavets did not prevent Schulz from being promoted to full-time teacher in 1929. It seems that what mattered to the School Board of Trustees was not Schulz’s masochistic manifestations in drawings but – as one of the letters on this matter put it – his “moral and political behaviour”⁵⁶. And there, nothing reprehensible was found in Schulz’s everyday conduct.

Today, after almost a hundred years that separate us from that era, it is difficult to question the results of the investigation conducted by leader Siara. The opinion he created about Schulz has already become “a solid fact” – a testimony not only to the author’s ways but also an interpretation of the official opinion about him. The problem is that this is not the only opinion. Other witnesses – more or less reliable – present things differently. What do they say? How did the teacher of drawing from Drohobych behave in terms of morality?

⁵⁴ The application from December 3, 1924 (no. L 1729) is in the CPAHU in Lviv.

⁵⁵ For example, in May and June 1922, during the Spring Salon at the Society of Fine Arts in Lviv, Schulz exhibited ten prints from *The Booke of Idolatry* – see *Katalog Salonu Wiosennego*, Lwów 1922.

⁵⁶ Cf. letter from the Board of the Lviv School District to the Starost Office in Drohobych of October 6, 1924, CPAHU in Lviv.

Years ago, Andrzej Chciuk's books sparked some heated disputes. Especially what he wrote in one of the paragraphs of his *Ziemia księżycowa*. The text talks about a certain December event in Schulz's life. Chciuk presents it in the following manner: "He lacked a woman then, and the abyss into which he was driven by his masochism, lured and tempted him to commit suicide. All this pushed him out from home on a December evening. He hid a whip under his coat. He went to a private whore who lived opposite the European Hotel. His students were standing on the corner of the market square next to the bus station, they were returning from a hockey match in Borysław. He pretended to be looking at film stills at the 'Wanda' cinema. He hid his whip, an accessory for perversion. He still had to find that woman who would beat him, he was already taken into the abyss of shame and the abyss of desire for exactly this. He went to see her, but the prostitute was reading his *The Street of Crocodiles* when he knocked at the door of her room"⁵⁷ – and so on, in a similar style. Ficowski questioned the veracity of this and other accounts from Chciuk, calling them "semi-fictionalized memories"⁵⁸. It is difficult to disagree with such an assessment. Chciuk's revelations require critical verification (and it would be worth finally making a thorough review of all his statements about Schulz), but even if this fiction writer only collected rumours, even if years later he repeated the rumours circulating in Drohobych, he also offered testimony worthy of attention. However, these rumours and gossip need to be assigned their proper importance. Under no circumstances should they be treated as information about events from Schulz's biography; instead, they might serve as environmental ideas about him. They constitute a more fleeting reality, but a reality nonetheless.

In the matter of Schulz's masochism, the voice of men – more generally speaking – does not come at a high price. The testimonies left by Chciuk, Friedman and others should be treated with caution. Because even if they tell the truth, it is a "second-hand truth", the truth they have heard, and then processed for the needs of your own narrative. Much more interesting and credible testimony in this matter can be given by Schulz's women – women whom he adored and whom he gave power over himself – women who took (or were just about to take) the place of that Beautiful Merciless Lady with a name that changed throughout history: Salome, Wanda, Adela... Let us start the review with the testimony of Zofia Nałkowska.

In her diary, Nałkowska records subsequent phases of Schulz's adoration, which at first seems "bizarre", although she accepts its postal manifestations "with both hands"⁵⁹. "I am surrounded by his letters, from which I derive

⁵⁷ A. Chciuk, *Ziemia księżycowa*, p. 78–79.

⁵⁸ RWH, p. 136.

⁵⁹ Entry from July 11, 1933; quoted after: Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki*, vol. IV: 1930–1939, part 1: 1930–1934, oprac., wstęp i komentarz H. Kirchner, Warszawa: Czytelnik 1988, p. 380.



**Man on All Fours and a Woman Running
Away**, ca. 1934 (?), black pencil, 16 × 20,
Museum of Literature in Warsaw

a lot of consent for myself”, she writes in her diary on September 10, 1933⁶⁰. In January of the following year, after Schulz left Zakopane, where they spent a few days together, she concluded: “I respond to his most vivid needs, I expose myself to his adoration all grateful and nice, I don’t forbid him from deifying me [...]. If not everything is said in an erotic way, the psychological bond seems to be solid. Long roads and conversations in snow and sun, the vast luxury of exchanging thoughts, amidst the miserable poverty of life, blocked and narrowed on every side”⁶¹. The next act takes place in April. After Schulz’s week-long stay in Warsaw, Nałkowska writes: “I didn’t think it would happen. But I’m calm. I applaud this choice of mine or this fate. Parting again”⁶². Hanna Kirchner, Nałkowska’s biographer, supposes that “during this week there must have been an ‘erotic addition’ to this closeness with the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*”⁶³. Letters are now coming from Drohobych continuously “with the old quiet sweetness, shy delight, happy with admiration” – notes their addressee and states: “But I am no longer in this place”⁶⁴. Nałkowska’s emotions are directed towards Bogusław Kuczyński. The diary entry from May 19, 1934 (written after she had received a bouquet of flowers from Schulz from distant Drohobych) leaves no doubts – the affair was over. When writing about her relationship with Schulz, she used the past tense: “I am obviously not the content of his existence in the degree that his letters and his beautiful words seem to suggest. It was not even called love. It was rather a form of cult, a proclaiming of my glory. And it wasn’t because of my qualities, or not only from them – but coming from his nature, craving humility and total abandon in adoration, and here finally finding an objective justification (in my “perfection”) of these sinful desires, an opportunity to express them in a higher erotic sphere. [...] With all the sadness that this sudden injustice is causing me, right now, after a year of this matter, and after that single night together – so unexpected, I would hardly want to mention my fear, growing more dangerous as the days pass”⁶⁵. And that is it. The thing was over.

There is nothing in the descriptions of Schulz’s “idolatrous” behaviour that would be a reason for the educational superintendent to disqualify him as a teacher. Schulz treats Nałkowska as an object of worship – distant and inaccessible. If the testimony of the adored woman is to be believed, sexual intercourse occurred only once. And one time too many. Adoration assumes (and

⁶⁰ Entry from September 10, 1933; quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 388.

⁶¹ Entry from January 16, 1934; quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 398–399.

⁶² Entry from April 15, 1934; quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 441.

⁶³ H. Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane*, W.A.B., Warszawa 2011, p. 406.

⁶⁴ Entry from May 10, 1934; quoted after: Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki*, vol. IV, part 1, p. 447.

⁶⁵ Entry from May 19, 1934; quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 449 (first underscore – SR).

confirms) distance between bodies. He who takes on the role of an idolater, distances themselves from their idol forever. He is outside of the idol's world, outside – in a kneeling position.

Irena Kejlin-Mitelman presents her meeting with the author of *The Booke of Idolatry* in a different vein. In a letter to Ficowski⁶⁶, written years later, she returns to what happened in 1923 (or 1924). She met Schulz a year or two earlier in Kudowa, where she was undergoing treatment with her mother. The described scene takes place in the Kejlin's apartment in Warsaw. Schulz – persuaded by Irena's mother – agreed to portray the entire family. After painting the parents, it was the daughter's turn to sit for portrait. Irena was thirteen or fourteen years old at the time. She looked even younger (yet Schulz's portrait showed her as a sixteen-year-old)⁶⁷. The girl was to be depicted in the painting with a red rose. The artist did not like the prop. "Bruno – as she recalls – decided to replace the red rose I was holding with a lilac, which had just started to bloom, as it seemed to him more suitable 'for such a little girl'. He repainted the flowers, but he was not sure of his hand, so he balanced the painting in an oval frame on the easel and I sat at his hand. Mom went out to a meeting somewhere. Suddenly Bruno put down the palette, kneeled in front of me, leaned down and kissed my legs, somewhere near the fetlock, motionless. Only the hands lived an independent life and glided higher and higher up the calves until they reached my knees. From the very first moment I froze so much that I didn't even let the lilac out of my hand. It was my first encounter with a man – not only the first of its kind, but the first ever. But when I felt his hands under my dress, I jumped to my feet. A terrible thought went through me – not fear, I wasn't afraid of Bruno – the thought that Bruno would discover that I, a grown-up girl, am still wearing warm, woollen panties in the spring. I jumped, there were no hands, there was no mouth. Bruno stayed on all fours on the carpet. Drawing N° 8 in *Druga jesień*⁶⁸ is a precise, almost photographic reflection of his position and face at that moment. Only that it is not this contemptuously predatory woman who is walking away from him, it is a frightened little girl with unfashionably rosy cheeks. I was mentally developed, but not sexually, without a hint of flirtatiousness"⁶⁹.

66 This letter was published by Ficowski with numerous omissions – por. B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty, wspomnienia o pisarzu*, zebrał i oprac. J. Ficowski, WL, Kraków 1984, p. 45–51.

67 No portrait of Irena Kejlinówna has survived. A photograph from those years in the family collection gives an idea of its appearance. Cf. in this issue on p. 228.

68 Nałkowska refers to Ficowski's *Druga jesień* (WL, Kraków 1973), which the author must have sent to her with facsimile images of Schulz's only manuscript, and an album with his drawings. At number 8 – or rather, probably 9 – there is a reproduction of a drawing that is today in the collection of the Museum of Literature (cf. image on the opposite page).

69 Manuscript in the collections of the Ossolineum in Wrocław.

The girl did not tell anyone about what happened during the painting session. It seems that she remained silent afterwards as well. Until 1980. When she wrote the letter to Ficowski, she was already a mature and experienced woman. There, she explains that she could not omit “a more personal memory of Schulz – because it connects to all his being”⁷⁰. So she was aware of the importance of the event and its existence something more than a moral excess. She understood that she had been a – terrified! – witness to the unveiling, risky exposure of Schulz’s “I”. In the peculiar tribute he paid to her, Schulz certainly went beyond the limits. He lost control over his desires, and at the same time – a sense of reality. If the matter became known, at best he would have to say goodbye to his teaching position. And at worst? He was saved by the silence of the “scared little girl”, who at that time did not fully understand what had happened (“I didn’t know anything about deviations”)⁷¹. She found an explanation only later, after seeing the drawings from *The Booke of Idolatry*, which her mother showed her, saying: “Now you understand how unhappy he was”⁷². In her memoir, written more than half a century later, she uses Schulz’s idolatrous clichés and, with their help, wants to report on her past experiences to Ficowski. But these comparisons fail in some respect. The masochistic scenes depicted in Schulz’s drawings exclude any expansion of the idolater, who cowers submissively at the woman’s feet and rarely allows himself to turn his eyes towards her. Not to mention the possibility of any physical touch.

The described event never reached its climax. Schulz’s intention, whatever it was, ended up thwarted by little Irenka. We do not know in what direction idolatrous activities would develop. Would Schulz follow in the footsteps of Jakub, who adored Pauline and Polda – while both “the girls permitted the ardent ornithologist to study the structure of their thin and ordinary little bodies”⁷³? After “pulling Pauline’s stocking down from her knee”, would he admire “with enraptured eyes the precise and noble structure of the joint”⁷⁴? It is impossible to know whether this literary scenario would have been practiced. What is striking in this real event, though, is the breaking of the rules of idolatry. However, a glance at a photo of little Kejlinówna from the early 1920s is enough to understand why this could have happened. Her body is pre-sexual, it is still beyond gender divisions – that is probably why an expansion was possible, some touch, an attempt at intercourse (about which we do not know if it was supposed to be erotic).

70 Ibidem (emphasis – SR).

71 Ibidem.

72 Ibidem.

73 *Manekiny*, OP, p. 33; English translation: B. Schulz, “Tailors’ Dummies”, in: idem, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, London: Penguin Books 2008, p. 29.

74 Ibidem.

Alicja Mondschein-Dryszkiewicz, the author of the last testimony in this short review, “was by no means a shy girl”⁷⁵, when she first encountered Schulz. Their peculiar encounter, in which she was to play a special role, had been staged by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Who was she? Alicja, then twenty-something, even though she belonged to Witkacy’s circle of close friends, is now almost absent from biographies and chronicles of his life⁷⁶. She is also practically unknown in the world of schulzologists. And yet – as literary gossip holds – Witkacy even wanted to match her with Schulz. She considered herself a friend of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*. And I guess she indeed was.

She talked about her first meeting with Schulz many times⁷⁷. However, it seems that she left no written testimony. Jerzy Pomianowski took her place, being aware that “she should tell this story”⁷⁸. Pomianowski claims that he heard her account in 1939, when he was spending his last vacation before the war in Zakopane. Invited by Witkacy, he listened to the “grand conversations” he organised in the evening. “These conversations – he recalls years later – were attended by the beautiful Alicja Dryszkiewicz. [...] She had only two tasks: to make sure that the glasses were neither full nor empty, and secondly, to burst out laughing every five minutes without depending on the topic of conversation”⁷⁹. One day – Pomianowski continues – Witkacy and Dryszkiewicz disappeared. They came back the next day and then:

“Alicja said that Witkiewicz took her to Drohobych, because Mr Schulz’s second book, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* had just been published. Already on the train, Witkiewicz told her:

‘Alicja, when we get to Mr. Bruno Schulz’s house, I will knock at the door and then step back. When he opens the door and sees you, you are to slap him in the face as a greeting’.

‘I’ll never do that’, said Alicja, who was by no means a shy girl. She had read Schulz’s books and was already intimately close to, or expert at, literature.

75 Jerzy Pomianowski’s formulation – see *To proste. Opowieści Jerzego Pomianowskiego nagrane przez Joannę Szwedowską dla Programu II Polskiego radia*, red. E. Jogała, Austeria, Kraków–Budapeszt 2015, p. 216.

76 In Janusz Degler’s book *Witkacego portret wielokrotny. Szkice i materiały do biografii (1918–1939)* appears only once in a footnote (PIW, Warszawa 2009, p. 428). The most extensive note on it can be found in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy do żony (1932–1935)*, przygotowała do druku A. Micińska, oprac. i przypisami opatrzył J. Degler, PIW, Warszawa 2010, p. 574–575. Joanna Siedlecka also did not reach Alicja Dryszkiewicz in her reportage book *Mahatma Witkac* (first published in 1992), even though she died only in 2011.

77 Among others, Henryk Bereza, with whom she remained on friendly terms for many years – first directly, and after her departure to France in correspondence, but also to Allan Kosko and Jerzy Pomianowski.

78 J. Pomianowski, op. cit., p. 216.

79 Ibidem.

‘If you don’t agree, you will get off this train and never get to the station,’ said Witkiewicz.

So she agreed and they went to the famous house and the famous annex where Schulz lived and which was described so beautifully by Jerzy Ficowski, the best specialist in the world on Schulz’s work. They knocked on the door, Witkiewicz took two steps back and pushed Alicja forward. The door opened, and a small man stood there, leaning forward, looking under his eyebrows, under his bowed head. He didn’t even have time to speak when Alicja obeyed Witkiewicz’s orders like an automaton and slapped Bruno Schulz in the face. He fell at her feet, shouting: ‘Queen!’.

That is the story of Alicja. I imagine she must have told the whole truth. It may seem a shameful anecdote, as well as blasphemy com Schulz’s works, who adore him and who demand them respect for that seen during the celebration of national holidays, which in Poland are the gloomiest in the world.⁸⁰

And that is all for Pomianowski’s “second-hand” account. Not really everything inspires trust in it, does it? Therefore, two necessary corrections need to be made. First of all, let us push this event three or four years back in time.

In 1939, Alicja Mondschein married Captain Dryszkiewicz and soon after her daughter Ewa was born. It is difficult to imagine that in this situation she would be willing to take part in one of Witkacy’s projects. Witkacy’s most lively contacts with Miss Mondschein – as can be seen from his letters to his wife – were between 1934 and 1937⁸¹. And that was probably when her first meeting with Schulz took place. It is also unlikely that Witkacy would have dragged her all the way to Drohobych. The place of his sadomasochistic staging was rather Zakopane. This is proven by the trace left – on paper! – by the heroine of the event in a letter to Henryk Bereza. Unfortunately, this is a trace that refers to some earlier trace (which we do not know, really): “I probably have written to you before on how and why I met Witkacy and Bruno Schulz. What was my first meeting with Bruno Schulz like – and the next two weeks or a week later – what Witkacy demanded of me – and what were Witkacy’s intentions towards me – by sending Bruno to the house where I lived with my little dog, Puszka – alone? Why did Witkacy demand that I put my very high heels – while I was always barefoot around the house?! And I would rather wear sandals. I thought that Witkacy was preparing some ‘toomfoolery’ for me, a game that he loved to do – again, often drawing me in!”⁸². Perhaps the letter to which she refers has been preserved

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 217–218. Cf. further interesting reflections by Pomianowski on Schulz’s masochism.

⁸¹ It is also known that Witkacy visited Alicja in Ligota in Silesia in 1939 and painted her portrait, known only from photographs.

⁸² Letter from October 15, 1992, autograph in the Manuscript Department of the National Library in Warsaw.

among hundreds of Dryszkiewicz's letters to Bereza. Until the critic's archive is neatly sorted, one can only guess how this first masochistic meeting took place. Schulz – sent by Witkacy under some pretext to the house where Alicja lived – found the Beautiful Merciless Lady... Did the distant director of the event also order her – as in Pomianowski's version – to slap Schulz without any explanation?

If Witkacy assumed that the event he arranged was to be the beginning of a love relationship between the two of them, it turned out to be a complete fiasco. The account by the author of *Nadobnisie i koczkodany* is much less refined than the scenes from *The Booke of Idolatry*. It relies on the assumption that Schulz's masochism is compatible with symptoms presented in sexology and psychiatry textbooks (or even in popular stories), which is surprising when you remember that he wrote the following about sadism and masochism in Schulz's drawings: "He brought the expression of these mental combinations to the absolute limits of intensity and almost monstrous pathos"⁸³. Did Witkacy treat the masochism of Schulz differently? He sometimes makes far-reaching trivializations in this area. Let us observe one of many examples. In a letter to Schulz from April 23, 1938, presenting his mental state after the breakup with his lover, Witkacy writes: "I was disembowelled and hit with a whip at the mouth. (You would like it)"⁸⁴. It seems that even little Kejlinówna understood Schulz better and deeper. And he himself – let me remind you – treated his masochism not (only) as a beating with a whip, but as something that became a new "total *Weltanschauung* of an individual in all its ramifications". And this way of thinking was close to Witkacy. To see this, just read his insightful article *Twórczość literacka Brunona Schulza* from 1935.

Alicja finally escapes from Witkacy's theatre and becomes Schulz's friend and confidante. Years later, in one of her numerous letters to Henryk Bereza, she confesses: "I was under his spell, even though he terrified me". And further: "Our friendship lasted quite a long time – but we saw each other more often in Zakopane and a little in Warsaw"⁸⁵. What were their meetings like? How did they spend time together? How much "sadism", how much "masochism" was there?

I have selected a few fragments from Dryszkiewicz's unpublished letters that shed light on their relationships. The first ones describe their walks in Zakopane: "My colleagues – seeing me walking with Bruno S. – looked at me with interest, a then tall girl (and skiing friend) next to whom a little man in a beret was hidden – walking as if he was on a leash! We truly made a strange couple – though we weren't a couple at all, because it wasn't possible". A scene a bit like from *The Booke of Idolatry*. But the similarities are superficial. The tone of the letter quickly

⁸³ S.I. Witkiewicz, *Wywiad z Brunonem Schulzem*, OP, p. 471.

⁸⁴ KL, p. 289. Another example is the previously unpublished couplet by Witkacy on Schulz from December 31, 1934 (in the collection of Stefan Okowicz).

⁸⁵ Letter from October 15, 1992.

changes: “We often played hopscotch (in my yard), a strange childish game. Or, while walking, we pushed a pebble towards and away from each other and walked in a zigzag manner, to the scandal of people. Besides, just think of our outfits!”. Here is another change: “Bruno had a jacket either too short or too long, and I was next to him – whether it was summer or autumn – in an orange fashionable skirt, quite short, slit from the waist down – and underneath it similar same panties – my belly is bare, and above it – something like a bra with suspenders – also orange. I sewed this outfit myself and when we were out of town – for a walk somewhere in the valleys, of which there are countless in Zakopane – it was enough for me to undo two buttons to parade around without a skirt. I was always very very tanned and had long and beautiful legs. Everyone was watching us and tapping their foreheads to show that ‘two crazy freaks’ were passing by”.

Astonishing scenes. A man approaching fifty and a woman in her twenties. Sometimes it is a sinless game of hopscotch, sometimes it is sinful games with more or less hidden eroticism. And no trace of masochism?

But can Alicja be trusted? Apart from Pomianowski’s account, no other evidence has been preserved about her meetings with Schulz. Bereza, whom she told about the event, and later wrote about it many times, has no doubts about the matter. He assures that Dryszkiewicz “does a lot to make her memories vivid and takes care of certain narrative effects. But despite the apparent partial unreliability, everything in her stories is absolutely beyond any suspicion”⁸⁶. If that seems the case, let us have a look at another fragment from her letter:

“Once, in a sports hall in Zakopane, when [Schulz and I] were lying in the sun, he asked me what I really thought of him – was he perhaps crazy? Or maybe just *illumine*, that is, haunted. Of course, I agreed that he was haunted. “Do you think I will be famous and rich and happy one day?”. “Of course you are”, I said, “but only after you die”. I was afraid of what I had just said, because he was like a sick animal he curled up into a ball, turned pale – but his curling up was like that of a foetus in the mother’s belly – at that time I was watching how girls do it – a medical book in which there was one page – you could unfold it and it was a coloured page – and there was an engraving of a pregnant woman with a foetus in her belly. He curled up and became like that ugly foetus, and his face was always somehow triangular – with a head that was too big, with a tight and pointed bottom – then it terrified me. He raised his hands and cupped his head. I was desperately trying

⁸⁶ A. Wiedemann, P. Czerniawski, *Końcówki. Henryk Bereza mówi*, Hałart, Kraków 2010, p. 63. Similarly, elsewhere: “I have heard all the stories about Witkacy and Schulz many times. I am quite an astute listener and I know what the actual basis of her narrative version is; in any case, those who question the authenticity of her knowledge make absolutely no sense [...]. For me, the story of Alicja’s matchmaking with Schulz is completely credible. What Alicja has to say about Schulz – whether what she says or what she described in her letters to me – is obviously based on her personal contacts with Schulz” (p. 63). There is also information that her stories were recorded (p. 66).



Sketch of a Man (Dogman) Kneeling – ca.
1936, pencil, 15 × 18, Museum of Literature
in Warsaw

to tear his hands away – I was apologizing for what I had said. He didn't want to look at me – didn't want to straighten up, either – for a long time. He was just a bundle of suffering!”

I believe these moving stories. Why would Schulz's friend from the second half of the 1930s invent them at the end of her life and include them in private letters to Bereza? She interested Bereza much earlier. The two of them had been in a friendly relationship since the 1950s, which lasted despite the distance of several thousand kilometres that separated them. It seems that Bereza only served as a medium thanks to which her old meetings with Schulz came back to her with full intensity⁸⁷.

So were these meetings innocent? Sinless? That seems to be the case. The way Dryszkiewicz presents them, they bear no resemblance to the masochistic scenes that appear in many accounts of men who witnessed Schulz's life “second-hand”. Interestingly, whenever Dryszkiewicz changes perspective, she immediately falls into the same pattern that governs Chciuk's and Friedman's stories about Schulz's sexuality. Moreover, her account is even more graphic than this masochistic pattern would suggest. And then her words sound like this: Bruno “asked his prostitutes – and he had several of them – to beat him, to spit on him, to kick him with their log-like legs into a gutter full of mud, to poop on him and call him Jewish scab!”⁸⁸.

Nothing remains of the aura of innocent meetings, walks and funny street theatrics, of the silence of mutual confessions, or of the understatements. The sinless summer is coming to an end. Schulz's trusted girlfriend – led by the hand – finally stands on the edge of his dark experiences. Repeating what Schulz told her, she hands him over to Krafft-Ebing.

You can go on like this forever. You can move from images to words and stories composed of these words, and then from known to unknown stories, which – emerging suddenly and unexpectedly – destroy the slowly calming surface of discourse Schulzologists have produced about Schulz's masochism. It is high time to put a full stop here. As always, an authoritative one.

A cut-off – appearing in so many forms, taking so many different forms (described here and not described really) in the life and work of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*: self-castration, bowing, distance, severance, shyness, adoration, idolatry, masochism, walking “as if on a leash”, playing hopscotch, facing



⁸⁷ The direct reason for her return to Schulz were Janusz Rudnicki's articles about him, published in 1992 by “*Twórczość*”. Dryszkiewicz read them with great anger – and then, in her letters to Bereza, she argued with Rudnicki. I shall suspend this thread until all of her correspondence sees the light of day.

⁸⁸ Letter to Bereza of December 24, 1992.

walls⁸⁹ – is a good starting point for understanding Schulz’s place in the world and his worldview. It often appears in one-time performances (in the masochistic theatre of *The Booke of Idolatry* and in compulsive drawings from the 1930s), as well as in literary fictions (such as walling up in the body, as closing in a glass jar or in a room without doors or windows). Various cut-off acts can also be found in Schulz’s everyday behaviour. Some of them are called “masochistic”. And rightly so. Masochism in general – and therefore also Schulz’s masochism – in order to strengthen itself and be fulfilled, needs detachment; therefore, it excludes any bodily closeness. No wonder it is not present in Schulz’s graphic works, in which his masochism is manifested. This lack of carnal proximity was noticed by Władysław Panas: “The image of normal erotic intercourse and direct physical contact (hugs, kisses, etc.) of women and husbands can only be seen in [...] bookplates [...]. However, other artistic and literary works show a completely different perspective on male–female relations”⁹⁰. What perspective is that? Panas provides no further explanation beyond their declared “pathological nature”.

In Schulz’s world, proximity does not exist. Idolatrous acts assume distance, which should under no circumstances be shortened or, even, eliminated. Masochistic scenes follow the same principle. Each blow of the whip strengthens and consolidates the boundaries between the subject and the object of masochistic activity. Masochism, as well as sadism – both described in *Psychopathia Sexualis* – praise detachment and distance. The idol should remain distant and inaccessible to the idolater (and vice versa). This peculiar – “perverted”, “perverse”, “pathological” – model of sexuality excludes procreation (and is therefore stigmatized as sinful). Worse, however, is that it also excludes others with their bodily concreteness. In contact with women, Schulz does not seek penetration, nor does he desire bodily fulfilment. If anyone still doubts this, read carefully again the biased descriptions of women’s bodies from the story August. Cutting off the penis in a dream prefigures all his “masochistic” behaviours. In an act of symbolic self-castration, Schulz cuts himself off from the sexual needs of his primal body – the biological one. His symbolically castrated body feels much better in the visual world of the drawing, which becomes his first world. It does not imitate, represent, or pretend. It is what it is. A place of complete existence.



89 In a letter dated December 24, 1992, Dryszkiewicz assures that Bruno “always slept... curled and turned to the wall, to the wallpapers – which maybe were his salvation and his shelter or protection from the world.

90 W. Panas, *Bruno od Mesjasza. Rzecz o dwóch ekslibrisach oraz jednym obrazie i kilkudziesięciu rysunkach Brunona Schulza*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2001, p. 42. A similar observation was made by Marek Zaleski: “Schulz, in contacts with all these beautiful and wise women, is fulfilled in discreet staging, but avoids proximity” (*Echa idylli w literaturze polskiej doby nowoczesności and późnej nowoczesności*, Universitas, Kraków 2007, p. 191, emphasis – SR).

Looking at Schulz's graphics and drawings, it seems that his separation from his own (and other people's) corporeality, and consequently his rejection of biological dimension of existence is final – it seems that the artist is no longer able to go back: from the image of the body, from a phantasm to the act. It seems that every attempt to remove the distance and to cross the border, every attempt at proximity will end in failure. It seems that he is left with creativity – drawing not instead, but as a sexual act, writing as seduction and adoration. But no, not really. At a certain moment – always suddenly, always as a compulsion, always as an irresistible desire – Schulz abandons the (powerless) words and (treacherous) images. The wonderful masochistic emblems of *The Booke of Idolatry*, like the compulsive drawings in which the boundary between being and representation is blurred, lose their power.

Schulz goes to a meeting... with whom? With himself?

Sexuality is not pictorial. It quickly exceeds its initial iconicity. The sight of an erotic body that evokes desire and strengthens sexual drive, leads only to this body (previously perceived or imagined) in all its biological concreteness. In the sexual act, this initial image of the erotic body disintegrates. Sight then loses its privileged place. Lovers – who owe a lot to their self-image – close their eyes in the sexual act. The image has brought them together. But now that they are together, it should disappear. Their eyes are closed (even when they are still staring at each other, still not sure whether they are together – with each other, in each other...). At a certain moment, however, the visible world irrevocably disappears. The testimony of the eyes is no longer needed. The opening of the lovers is unconditional. Consent to someone's closeness no longer requires justification. The lovers unreservedly accept each other's bodies – and their non-pictorial manifestations: smells and tastes, touches of skin, their moisture, saliva, sweat, sperm...

Schulz's "cut off" (that is, masochistic) sexuality does not know this state – the state of fusion. It is idolatrous and therefore irrevocably iconic. It is fulfilled in what is visible – and therefore distant, cut off, detached.

But this sexuality also has its dark side. Schulz's words and images lead towards the edge of a cliff, beyond which opens a dark and inexpressible space of his existence. He never tried to present it visually, let alone describe it. Is there access to it? There is none. Schulz turns away from the world and from the woman who causes him pain. He closes it within his boundaries, hides it in the nooks and crannies of his body, the boundaries of which become harder as suffering becomes more severe. How can it turn into delight? I do not know.

Now you too see "how unhappy he was".

Paweł Dybel: Schulz's Masochism and the Word's Threshold of Shame

The masochist means to show [...] that the desire of the Other lays down the law.

Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*.
Book X, p. 106

A certain Mme. Magda Wang, tethered by the train of her gown, declared above a modest décolletage that she frowned on manly determination and principles and that she specialized in breaking the strongest characters. [...] There were methods, she continued through clenched teeth, infallible methods she could not divulge here, referring the readers to her memoirs [...]; in them, she listed the results of her experiences in the Colonies with the “dressage” of men [...].”

Bruno Schulz, “The Book”, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, p. 9

Galicia as *the genius loci* of masochism in the 19th century. Sacher-Masoch and the psychiatric concepts of Krafft-Ebing and Freud

The phenomenon of masochism is probably as old as time, but attention was paid to it, and attempts were made to conceptualize it theoretically only at the beginning of modernity. This happened in psychiatry in the second half of the 19th century; the first author who used the term “masochism” and created its first theory was the Austrian psychiatrist and sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. He was inspired by the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, an Austrian who – like Bruno Schulz – lived in Galicia, and who, in his partially autobiographical novel *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Furs*), showed a man who wanted to be whipped and humiliated by a beautiful woman. Krafft-Ebing presented his theory in the work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), in which he attempted to provide his own definition of masochism, identified its connections with sadism, and classified its varieties (e.g., ideal, symbolic, feminine, and embryonic masochism).

American historian Larry Wolff in a book about nineteenth-century Galicia under Habsburg rule has recently pointed out that the basis for the emergence of Sacher-Masoch's similarly perverse tendencies were the feudal social relations

prevailing in the Galician countryside. A characteristic feature of them was the particular cruelty of the Polish nobility towards peasants. This was clearly expressed in their treatment of their subjects as animals and their preference for corporal punishment in the form of whipping (with an actual whip or a stick). Sometimes the application of these punishments was associated with sexual humiliation of peasants and their wives. Following Sacher-Masoch, Wolff quotes the story of Onufry, a Ruthenian peasant. In this account, a Polish nobleman ordered their peasant women to lift their dresses and he ordered all peasants to identify their women from behind. If any of them did not recognize his wife, he received fifty lashes from their "honourable sir".

As a child, Sacher-Masoch was also an eyewitness to the anti-nobility uprising of Galician peasants led by Jakub Szela, which ended in a bloody massacre. These events were the subject of his first novel, in which the character of a young Polish noble woman Wanda appears, who rides a horse and tries to pish away with a whip the peasants who want to rape her.

According to Wolff, all these bloody events and stories about them left a lasting mark on the history of Galicia and over time, led the Austrian writer to connect sexual life with humiliation by a naked woman dressed only in fur, which he expressed directly in the above-mentioned book *Venus in Fur*. This should also explain the fact that the phenomenon of masochism was later so popular in Galician literature and art at the turn 19th and 20th centuries.

In psychiatry, however, the issue of masochism would be discussed later by Freud, who returned to it many times in his works. He was primarily intrigued by the relationship between masochism and sadism that seemed to him not only deeply ambiguous but also genealogically unclear. This is eloquently reflected in the evolution of his views on this issue. In the early days, Freud claimed that masochism was the product of the Self redirecting its sadistic inclinations (initially targeted at others) towards itself. Such an approach assumed that masochism is a derivative phenomenon and constitutes a kind of pathology of sadism, as a result of which the pursuit of destruction turns into self-destruction.

In the later period, when Freud formulated a version of his drive theory based on the opposition of Eros and Thanatos, he reversed this approach. He came to the conclusion that masochism is a phenomenon primary to sadism. Therefore, he distinguished two forms of masochism. The first is primary masochism, in which the destructive death drive combines with Eros, subordinating it to itself, and turns against the Self – hence the experience of pleasure in pain by the Self is a primary rather than secondary phenomenon. In secondary masochism, the aggression that the sadistic self directs towards others is turned against the self as such. The latter type builds itself over the former, constituting a specific inversion of it. Originating from sadism, which in this perspective constitutes a transformation of primary masochism (the aggression of the self, which it turned against

itself, directed towards others), it forces the sadistic self to turn (again) against itself. In this approach, secondary masochism is sadism turned against itself. So it has a completely different “quality” than primary masochism, although externally its symptoms may not differ much from those of the latter.

Freud’s late approach to the phenomenon of masochism is not so much a rejection as a transformation; it “supplements” the earlier approach by pointing to the primary drive basis of masochism, which is Thanatos conquering Eros and “allied” with it. This rather peculiar alliance of Thanatos and Eros in masochism, which results in pleasure drawn from humiliation and pain, is a most mysterious bond – and it seems difficult to explain in rational discourse. The only thing left is to look carefully at human masochistic behaviours and reconstruct their genealogy, which in places uses pure speculation.

There is something deeply irrational and difficult about the phenomenon of masochism if one wants to explore it and explain in a common-sensical way. It is determined by the subject’s sexual pleasure, which they can experience only when they experience the pain of humiliation and annihilation. Freud explains this phenomenon by pointing to a situation in which the death drive connects in the human psyche with Eros, subordinating it to itself. Thanks to this, Thanatos also gains power over the subject who, finding pleasure in humiliation and pain, is ready to submit to its destructive influence. Freud also suggests that these situations are nothing unusual. What constitutes human sexuality is the fact that it often happens to create highly suspicious alliances with Thanatos, unwittingly putting itself at the service of thanatic powers of destruction.

This statement of Freud, closely related to his late theory of drives, initially aroused enormous resistance in academic and bourgeois circles. It indicated something deeply disturbing in the human being itself – something to which people had tried to turn a blind eye and made taboo: the particular ease with which human sexual drives are ready to form various alliances with death drives.

When asked why this happens, Freud’s theory no longer produced answers. It only pointed to the drive basis of masochism and various additional factors that, in certain circumstances, could contribute to its formation. In some cases, it seems, the answer should be sought in the individual features of someone’s biography, the events occurring in it, the structure of family relationships, and so on. But again, we can only guess.

Schulz’s masochism: individual, graphic and writerly

The same is true about Schulz’s masochism. We can guess that its sources lie in some complications of his family life, but we do not know anything certain about it. This does not mean that some facts known to us from the life of his family and from his childhood do not allow us to hypothesize on the matter. But these will only be hypotheses, not theorems based on “hard”, empirically verifiable

data. Anyway, in light of what we know about the biography of Schulz, one thing is certain: he had clear masochistic tendencies and expressed them in his drawings and stories.

When we want to write about Schulz's masochism, we immediately encounter the problem of relating his "individual" masochism to the way he presents this phenomenon in his drawings and prose. It would be quite naive and simplistic to equate these representations with the masochism of the writer himself. At the same time, however, this does not mean that they have nothing in common. When we study Schulz's drawings, which feature masochistic motifs, there is no doubt that they are an artistic presentation of his most "individual" problem. We can do something similar too about the figure of the narrator-son in his prose or the figure of the father, though here masochism takes a more veiled form. These various manifestations of masochism in Schulz's life and work are closely intertwined and it is impossible to completely separate them from each other.

By claiming this, I am probably uttering a real heresy in the eyes of many literary scholars. They will immediately accuse me of an anachronism based on the naive blurring of the boundary between the author as a living person with his own mental problems and the fictional narrator or characters of his artistic representations, created in language itself. Meanwhile, in their opinion, such an approach has already been overcome once and for all in the works of Russian formalists and structuralism. Post-structuralists have dealt with it definitively. This is done in such works as Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author", Michel Foucault's, "Who is an Author?" or Jacques Derrida's *Interpreting Signatures (Nietzsche/Heidegger)*.

Without diminishing in any way the originality of those approaches that opened up new perspectives for the interpretation of literary or philosophical texts, I claim that in the case of Schulz's work they all fail. It is impossible to make a clear distinction between Schulz as a living person, the author of the discussed prose, and the fictional narrator or characters who appear in it. Similarly, scenes with masochistic motifs depicted in his drawings, which often feature male figures surprisingly similar to Schulz, also refer us to the very "real" problem of the author himself. All these fictional characters are obvious *porte-paroles* for Schulz, through which he reflects both his own problems and his observations and reflections about people close to him. The specificity of his work results immediately from the special closeness and deep affinity of what is presented in it with the real person of its author and the world in which he lives. If we were to read it in accordance with Barthes' thesis about the "death of the author" and take into account only the context of other texts to which it consciously or unconsciously refers, being their modified quotation, we would lose the direct way of relating to reality that characterizes it.

An additional argument in favour of this thesis is the way in which Schulz's stories were written. We also know that they were artistically transformed

accounts of various real events from family life, contained in Schulz's letters to Debora Vogel. It follows that the relationship between fictional people and events that appear in these stories, and their real counterparts were very close. The latter usually constituted a source of Schulz's writerly inspirations, which he then processed and developed in his imagination. In their genesis, they were never fictitious stories invented by the writer.

At this point, a literary scholar (or an art critic) who values more sophisticated strategies could say that this genealogy of Schulz's stories is astonishingly anachronistic, if not downright primitive and vulgar, and that it does not live up to the quality of narrative styles and conventions of modern fiction. One could respond to this argument that this anachronism is in fact close to the way literature has always been based on real events, sometimes transforming them in a brilliant, phantasmatic manner – as in Homer's *Iliad*. This is where literature takes its source, the truth of the world that it describes, and the power of its influence on the readers' imagination.

Therefore, what for some is a contemptible anachronism, for others is an archaism worthy of the highest praise. The genealogy of the literary world is rooted in its archaeology, it is born on the basis of some primary experience of reality, from which it grows organically. In a similar way, the image of past worlds grows on the basis of their ruins and remains uncovered in archaeological works. Similarly, it can be said that the author's death never fully occurs in the literary text. Something of this author as a "living" individual with specific personality traits always remains. Horace already knew this well when he addressed us with his famous message *non omnis moriar*. In this case, mechanically repeating Barthes's slogans like a mantra will be of no use.

The word of prose and the threshold of shame

Taking up the topic of masochism in Schulz's work, I will try to take into account the special closeness and various connections in which the person of the author remains with the fictional narrator and the characters of his stories and the scenes shown in his drawings. A closer look at these two areas of his work allows us to look at Schulz himself through the prism of his male characters. After all, they are clearly his own *porte-paroles*. All his fascinations, problems, complexes, fears and phobias that he experienced in the everyday reality of Drohobych are centered on them. It is in them that the thread of masochism also comes to the fore as an identity drama that unfolds before our eyes in a different scenery and in various versions.

We should start with Schulz's interesting statement on this subject. When Józef Nacht said in a conversation with him: "I noticed that a long time ago you express yourself spiritually in writing and sexually in drawing", the writer allegedly replied: "That's how it is. I don't think I could write a masochistic

novel. I would be ashamed anyway, too”¹. Jerzy Ficowski, who commented on this statement, is undoubtedly right when he says that it is impossible to read it literally, because “in a more subdued form, organically connected with other elements of reality, these pieces [“radical” as they seem – PD] are, of course, also present in Schulz’s prose, they surround it with an almost omnipresent fluid, but they do not dare to enter it in all its nakedness, in its dominant expression and shape”². This statement assumes that if the difference between Schulz’s drawings and fiction is based on the fact that in the former his masochism comes to the fore in an open way, while in the latter it takes a hidden form, it is equally present in both cases.

The central importance of masochistic motifs both in the world of drawings and in the prose of the author of *The Street of Crocodiles* is hard to doubt today. As Marta Konarzewska writes: “It doesn’t take much to see masochism in the works of the Drohobych artist. It is simply there – on the surface, and also underneath. If it is not the object of representation, it is its logic. If the dominatrix (that masochistic *femme fatale* in a fur coat) is not a woman, she is the surplus matter – the sublime ‘hairiness,’ which absorbs the subject, presses against it and seizes it”³. But what is such masochism, indeed? What exactly is the different way in which these two areas of Schulz’s work come to the fore? What could be the genealogy of this difference? Later in the interview, as Ficowski reports, “Schulz, having confirmed that the same reality is expressed here and there, added that only different means of expression and material decide that ‘the drawing defines tighter boundaries’ and that he believed that in fiction he could express himself more fully”⁴.

There is a certain contradiction here. On the one hand, Schulz states that drawing allows him to “express himself” sexually – that is, among other things, to articulate his masochism – on the other hand, however, it limits him more. It does not allow him to fully express himself and his own vision of the world. And similarly, he can express himself more fully in prose, but at the same time his shame prevents him from revealing in the act of writing all his sexual fascinations. How can fiction allow him to express himself more fully, then, if he cannot write openly about what constitutes the very core of his personality – about his masochism? And at the same time: what is so special about drawing that when

1 J. Nacht, *Wywiad drastyczny*, “Nasza Opinia” 1939, nr 77.

2 J. Ficowski, *Kobieta – idol i władczyni*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga obrazów, słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 520.

3 M. Konarzewska, *On tylko udaje tak? Schulza i Gombrowicza zabawa w doktorowq*, in: Schulz, *Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, red. J. Majmurek, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2012, p. 91.

4 J. Ficowski, op. cit., p. 520.

he takes a pencil in his hand, he does not feel any inhibitions to express this masochism openly?

An instinctive response would be to point to the European tradition of visual arts in which female and male nudes have already acquired, so to speak, the right of citizenship. Therefore, the representation of the naked human body, especially of a woman, was not treated by the vast majority of recipients as something forbidden and scandalous. After all, visual arts have made use of naked human bodies since ancient times to expose their beauty as divine or natural creations. This approach allowed artists to exhibit their own relationship to sexuality, often under the guise of mythological references, scenes from the life of the holy family, genre scenes and so on.

Moreover, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, masochistic motifs were quite openly used in paintings and drawings. In a hidden way, they came to the fore even earlier. So when Schulz drew naked women's bodies, which were objects of idolatry admired by men, his drawings were not unusual in terms of subject matter, but they fitted into the already rich tradition. Moreover, in the case of drawing we always deal with a sketched "diagram" of a naked human body, deprived of its visual literalness, as in representational painting. Naked bodies in the drawings are a metaphor for actual nudity – and that is always easier to digest for those who find any representation of nudity in art unacceptable.

Perhaps, Schulz's exhibitionism in drawings was possible thanks to one more factor. In the Jewish tradition, whose pressure Schulz must have felt, even though he grew up in an assimilated family with a secular attitude to life, a very specific attitude towards fine arts was defined by the prohibition of creating images of God. However, if such images were considered sacrilege in the religious order, then any depiction of secular people and matters in the visual arts were treated as having no major significance. It was a kind of secular idolatry, the uncritical worship of various substitute gods set up in the place of the true God.

However, presenting the naked human body in words of prose that highlighted sexuality, or even showed it in various erotic positions or poses, in the light of Orthodox Jewish tradition was treated as a serious offense.

A similar approach was taken by the conservative Polish reader community who found it simply unacceptable. For example, when Żeromski tried to include a fragment in *Przedwiośnie* describing in detail the love scene between Cezary Baryka and Laura Kościeniecka, he had to give it up, offering instead an ironic comment on what he could not write about⁵. It is also enough to remember what problems Emil Zegadłowicz (a writer Schulz highly appreciated) had with the

5 S. Żeromski, *Przedwiośnie*, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976, p. 102.

publication of his novels *Zmory* and *Motory*, due to the erotic themes appearing in them. However, regardless of these objective factors related to the history of the communities, there was a subjective reason why Schulz was unable to write a “masochistic novel” It was... shame. Schulz admits this directly in the above-mentioned interview. Commenting on it, Ficowski recounts Schulz's words from a letter to Romana Halpern. On her request for them to be on first-name basis, Schulz states that he would prefer to start “with a ‘you’ in conversation” because for him writing is “more embarrassing than speaking”⁶. This statement shows that the sources of the writer's “shame” concern not only the introduction of masochistic – or even erotic – threads in his prose, but also concern writing in general. They are therefore much more significant, related to his approach to the written word as such.

At this point, Schulz's attitude towards his own fiction is quite different from that of Żeromski and Żegadłowicz. It was also the case with Witkacy and Gombrowicz, who had no inhibitions about introducing “drastic” sexual motifs into their own work. It seems this approach stems from Schulz's strong identification with the narrator-son and the characters of his stories, especially with his father. Unlike in the drawings with their obsessive masochistic motifs, from which he has no distance as their creator (a testimony to this is the paradoxical fact that he has no qualms about introducing a male character with features similar to his), in his fiction these motifs appear in a deeply transformed and sublime way. So if in the drawings we are dealing with Schulz's exhibitionism, in his fiction there is “shame” before manifesting his own sexuality – a shame pushed to extreme limits.

Based on various biographical and autobiographical accounts, we know that the image of intrafamily relations presented by Schulz in his short stories did not differ much from reality. His father Jakub sickly and prone to daydreaming, of small stature and long hair, as he is depicted in his son's drawings, had a very secular attitude to life. He was very reminiscent of his literary *porte-parole*. It is also known that Schulz's father engaged in dreamy speculations and had a great sense of humour⁷.

The mother, in turn, as Ficowski writes, seemed to tread more firmly on the ground, raising children and running the house. She seems to have treated Bruno with a lot of care and tenderness and pampered him in her own way.

⁶ Cited after: J. Ficowski, *op. cit.*, p. 521.

⁷ Jerzy Ficowski writes that the Schulz family belonged to “the Jewish religious community, but – far from conservatism – they were closer to secular rather than Jewish reading, more associated with shop abacuses than with the synagogue menorah, although they visited the Drohobych prayer house from time to time” – J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1975, p. 21–22.

Other reports – which Ficowski does not mention – show that she could also be very strict towards her son. In particular, she chastised him for his drawings of naked female figures, which seemed to her deeply immoral. He apparently took this criticism very seriously⁸.

Oedipal family triangle and cruel nanny

Ficowski suggests that the attitude of Schulz's nanny who punished him quite strictly during the absence of his parents must have had a key impact on the development of Schulz's masochism. Due to his innate shyness, he did not have the courage to complain to parents about the nanny. Even if we accept that there is a grain of truth in this story, it seems that it could have been only one of many factors that contributed to the writer's masochistic approach towards women. He admitted to exactly that in the interview mentioned at the beginning of this article, agreeing with the journalist's suggestion that masochism determines his attitude to sexuality⁹.

However, if the issue of Schulz's masochism is beyond doubt, the question about its sources remains open. The answer to this question is never provided by his drawings, which are artistic articulations of masochism, rather than an exploration of its genesis. We will probably find such an answer in his prose. Although the author's masochism is not manifested directly, we do get a rich picture of the home life of the Schulz family and the social environment in which the writer grew up. Even though the people and events that appear in the stories have undergone a far-reaching transformation, on the basis of the events narrated there, we can recreate certain elements of the writer's "family romance". In particular, the specific character of the relationship he had with his parents, that is, the role played by father and mother figures in the formation of his identity.

This relationship clearly took on a form that contributed to the development of a perverse identity in the writer. It was characterized by – to use a narrative close to Lacan's psychoanalysis – a substitute staging by the writer's subject of the action of the Law, whose rule his father did not establish in him in a sufficiently convincing manner – in a manner that would give the Law the status of indisputable obviousness in the son's eyes. Therefore, the subject must invent a replacement ritual in which this Law is established, and repeat this ritual indefinitely.

⁸ I obtained this information from Schulz's student from Drohobych, a Polish Jew who later in the interwar period emigrated with her husband (now a retired professor of physics at the University at Buffalo) to the United States.

⁹ We find confirmation of Schulz's masochism in the memories of people who knew him, collected and commented on by Wiesław Budzyński in the book *Schulz pod kluczem* (Warszawa: Bertelsmann 2001).

In Schulz's case, this ritual is a staging of his own humiliation by women whom he also adores in an idolatrous way as ideal enforcers of the Law. However, since this realization of the Law by women was staged by the author himself, this Law is merely an appearance – the effect of a game devised by the male masochistic subject – a game in which the woman is merely a tool in his fantasies. Therefore, the scene of male humiliation must be re-enacted over and over again. No wonder that in Schulz's drawings there are scenes with men kneeling in front of naked women and getting whipped. These images come back obsessively with a tire-some monotony.

These scenes are a kind of “additional” strategy for Schulz by which he seeks to save the authority of the Law in his own eyes. At the same time, he wants to save his own love for his father by showing him as a fallen patriarch who, indulging in his fetishist fantasies, desperately tries to regain his lost domestic kingdom. That is why scenes with the father are pervaded by the attitude of “loving criticism” on the part of the narrator-son¹⁰. Although the father indeed failed as a representative of the Law, he is not at all a character that can be taken seriously. At the same time, however, in his grotesque madness, he is a deeply tragic figure with whom the narrator-son has a deep emotional connection. The basis of this relationship is the father's fetishism – it constitutes a deep spiritual kinship of father and son.

This interpretation is supported in Schulz's prose not only by the constant absence of the father at home, caused by his illness, as a result of which the narrator-son remains under the sole care of his mother (and Adela). His withdrawal from all household matters also plays an important role – in the text as much as in reality. The father is mainly occupied with running the shop, which isolates him from family life, limiting his contacts with his son to a minimum. He only lives in the world of his own fetishist fantasies, which is a closed world. Nobody has access to it. There is something like a pane of glass between him and his son, even when the son visits him in the sanatorium, he only lives his own life, he has no time to sit down and talk to him longer. In fact, while the narrator-son is interested in contact with his father, the father dismisses him rather easily.

This withdrawal of the father from family matters and his degradation as the domestic Patriarch is contrasted with the attitude of the mother running the household, treating her husband with a tinge of irony and mockery. In various

¹⁰ This term was used by Juliusz Kleiner, describing Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and its approach to nobility who were unable to rise above internal quarrels and stand together against the Russian invader. Also in this case, the sense of the law failed, and instead it was decided to bring justice to the Soplica family through forceful possession. Cf. J. Kleiner, *Zarys dziejów literatury polskiej*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków: Ossolineum 1963.

ways, the mother undermines the father's authority in her son's eyes, gives him a knowing look when the father does something strange: exclaims some words, complains about salespeople and the whole world. A strange alliance of those who "know" then develops between mother and son. In an even more drastic and cruel way, the father's authority is undermined by Adela, who constantly "castrates" his flamboyant masculinity, destroying his bird kingdom in the attic with a broom, hitting the weak point of his fetishism, when at a crucial moment during his pathetic speech, she suddenly bares her leg and presents her foot in a snake-like shoe.

The "family romance" of the Schulz house, which takes place in accordance with a similar logic, fits into the pattern of the Oedipal triangle in the form that leads to the development of a perverse form of identity in the son¹¹. Even if, as Ficowski suggests, in the formation of the writer's masochism, the nanny (Adela?) who punished him as a child played some role, it could by no means have been the only factor. The writer's traumatic experiences, which were the result of the punishments used by that nanny, must have fallen on a fertile ground, which in this case was the specific Oedipal arrangement of father and mother roles at home. Only then could these punishments lead to the consolidation of the writer's masochistic tendencies. This peculiar Oedipal arrangement is well demonstrated by various scenes from family life presented in Schulz's stories.

Masochism and the model of courtly love

The masochistic motifs appearing in Schulz's drawings and – in a camouflaged way – in his prose can also be viewed as a perverse version of the "courtly love" model. In it, the adoration of a woman by a man was also associated with elevating her to the rank of a semi-divine, beautiful object to which homage should be paid and whose all attributes should be adored. Here, the woman occupied the position of a romantic partner, who it, is inaccessible, but thanks to this, the love relationship gains spiritual durability¹². Moreover, as in Schulz's drawings,

¹¹ Bruce Fink shows the development of this drama in a very clear way, starting from Lacan's approach to perverse orientation in a child. He points to a specific type of Oedipal relationship, which serves as a very its basis: "In cases in which there is a very close bond between mother and son, a father – in order to bring about a separation – has to be quite forceful in his threats and /or quite convincing in his promises of esteem and recognition. But the very fact that such a close bond has been able to form suggests that the father either is incapable of fulfilling the paternal function or does not care to interfere. [...] And even if he does try to do so, he may be undermined by the boy's mother, who, the moment the father's back is turned, winks at the boy, letting him know that their special relationship will secretly remain unperturbed" – B. Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Theory and Technique* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 173.

¹² The term object a (objet petit a), in Lacan's terms, means a beautiful object that, like beauty, blows away set on precious stones, the box gives rise to the subject's desire to open it, in the

in the tradition of courtly love, the elevation of a woman was the product of male fantasy. The woman was only a passive object of these fantasies, which should obediently take the place assigned to it.

Slavoj Žižek, pointing out in *Metastases of Enjoyment* the key role that the model of courtly love played in the formation of ideas about women and love in the European tradition, claims that this role becomes fully understandable only when we take into account its close connection with masochism. In his opinion, this is due to the fact that courtly love is only a matter of courtesy and etiquette, and not a primary passion that involves men's "sincere" feelings aimed at the chosen one. Žižek took this view of courtly love from Jacques Lacan, who wrote a short statement on this subject in his early *Écrits*¹³. According to Žižek, in the case of courtly love, "we are dealing with a strict fictional formula, with a social game of 'as if', where a man pretends that his sweetheart is the inaccessible Lady. And it is precisely this feature which enables us to establish a link between courtly love and a phenomenon which, at first, seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with it: namely, masochism, as a specific form of perversion articulated for the first time in the middle of the last century in the literary works and life-practice of Sacher-Masoch"¹⁴.

Later in his essay, Žižek, referring to Gilles Deleuze's well-known book on masochism¹⁵, states that unlike sadism, in which inflicting pain and tormenting others is treated more seriously, "in masochism negation assumes the form of disavowal – that is, of feigning, of an 'as if' which suspends reality"¹⁶. Therefore, according to Žižek, both in the case of courtly love and masochism, we are dealing with the behaviour dominated by convention, which consists in "faking" love or humiliation in accordance with a specific, pre-arranged ritual. In other words, it is just a game that cannot be played seriously, because from start to finish it was arranged by those who participate in it.

This deep affinity between the model of courtly love and male arrangement of masochism, according to Žižek, is that in this first case, the Lady praised by the knight "has nothing whatsoever to do with the opposition of woman submitted to phallic signifier and woman qua bearer of the Other enjoyment". The Lady is the projection of man's narcissistic Ideal, her figure emerges as the result of the

hope that the real treasure is hidden there. Meanwhile, after opening it, it turns out to be empty - which forces the subject to transfer his desire to another object, similarly seducing him with its inner beauty.

¹³ J. Lacan, *Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine*, in: idem, *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil 1966.

¹⁴ S. Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, London, New York: Verso 1994, p. 91.

¹⁵ G. Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, in: idem, *Masochism*, New York: Zone Books 1991.

¹⁶ S. Žižek, op. cit., p. 91.

masochistic pact by way of which woman accepts the role of dominatrix in the theatre staged by man”¹⁷.

In other words, the Lady is neither an ordinary “tamed” woman – wife, lover, etc. – with whom a man can have sexual intercourse, nor a mystic devoted to the Other-God. The Lady is solely a product of a male fantasy in which she was raised to the rank of an inaccessible Thing. And it is this inaccessibility that makes her particularly attractive in a man’s eyes. He can then worship her as his Lady, whose commands he should obey without objection.

In the light of this approach, the masochistic motifs appearing in Schulz’s drawings and prose fit very well into the model of courtly love conceived in this way: everything depends on the man’s arrangement of the scene in which the woman occupies the key position of the Lady and Ruler. This identification is possible because, in Žižek’s eyes, the position of the male subject in the model of courtly love is always that of a masochist.

However, such a view seems to be quite an exaggeration. To justify his own position, Žižek mentions, following Lacan, the example of a poem in which its author complains that his Lady makes him lick her ass¹⁸. However, this is an extreme case and – in the rich tradition of courtly love – constitutes an exception rather than a rule. In addition, even this example could hardly be considered as evidence of a masochistic attitude. After all the author of the poem complains about the strange demand of his Lady, and, therefore, clearly draws no pleasure from her humiliating acts. In fact, she is the director of this entire scene, not him!

In typical representations of courtly love, men who praise the virtues of their chosen ones do not demean themselves and do not feel the need to do so. On the contrary, by making them the perfect object of their lyrical tirades and sighs and by following their orders, they confirm their masculinity¹⁹. Knights do not appear to Ladies as miserable creatures whom they can despise, whom they can beat with a whip, and so on. On the contrary, as their subjects and servants they are elevated in their masculine dignity, and the tasks they obediently perform are merely a necessary test.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 132.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 130.

¹⁹ Žižek further states: “The knight’s relationship to the Lady is thus the relationship of the subject-bondsman, vassal, to his feudal Master-Sovereign who subjects him to senseless, outrageous, impossible, arbitrary, capricious ordeals” – ibidem. A question remains, however: what historical sources allow one to make such claims? It seems that, as in many other opinions of this author, it is just an impressive statement hastily formulated to support the hypothesis, without thoroughly checking its credibility. In addition, it is worth recalling that both Lacan and Foucault saw the medieval relationship between the knight and the Sovereign as a case of subjectification rather than humiliating for the former. In other words, thanks to this relationship the knight became a subject (*sujet*) rather than the object of power.

Therefore, if Žižek rightly points out that in the case of both courtly love and women's masochistic idolatry, we are usually dealing with male arrangements that assign women the position of rulers in advance, he is wrong if he identifies two versions of this arrangement on this basis. The arrangement that is the basis for courtly love differs fundamentally from the masochistic arrangement. In the first one, the man idealizes the Lady, elevating her to the status of a spiritual, ethereal ideal, turning the woman – as Žižek writes – into a mirror on which he “projects his narcissistic ideal”, strengthens himself in his subjectivity. In this way, although he hides the traumatic quality of the Lady, he displaces her as an unimaginable Thing situated at the level of the Real. Nevertheless, contrary to what the Slovenian philosopher claims, this imaginative strategy on the part of the man is by no means secondary. The point is for the man to confirm his masculinity in the glow of this feminine ideal.

In the context of Lacan's teaching, the model of courtly love seems to be merely a radicalization of how men tend to relate to women within the so-called patriarchal culture. Within this tradition, the position of a woman towards a male subject is that of an ideal “beautiful object” created by the imagination of this subject. It is the result of an imaginary “game” between them, the rules of which are determined by the man²⁰. This imaginary “game”, however, is not only a matter of the man's domination over the woman, or even of a specific convention that took shape in the Middle Ages. It is an essential starting point in all relationships between men and women. If a woman does not take on the role prescribed for her by the man's fantasy, there will be no “spark” between them. This assumes not only that the “sexual relationship” (*rapport sexuelle*) between them has a purely phantasmal basis, but also that it requires one of the partners to take the position of the subject and the other of the object the other person adores.

However, in a masochistic relationship, a man's adoration of a woman is inextricably linked to his expectation that he will be humiliated by her, and the manner of this humiliation he arranges himself from start to finish. Therefore, masochistic motifs appearing in Schulz's drawings and his stories should be considered a degraded, pathological version of the model of courtly love. They are a kind of parody in which the male subject can establish a “sexual relationship” with a woman only by making her humiliate him. And if so, what should be the source of the subject's tendency to such self-abasement? And is Schulz's idolatrous attitude towards women exactly the same as the adoration of them in the model of courtly love?

²⁰ In this sense, as Lacan says, the sexual relationship (and with it the woman) “does not exist” because nothing real corresponds to it; it is the result of appearances, a male fantasy about a woman.

Troubadour and masochist

The durability of the masochistic attitude as the dominant tendency in mental life is related to the fact that the subject, not being able to submit his sexual drive to the Law enforced by his father, and thus confirm himself in his own eyes, associates the satisfaction related to this drive with the pursuit of self-humiliation and destruction²¹. The lack of a sense of the presence of this Law in his life, and at the same time desperate efforts to establish it at least as a substitute, make Schulz feel shame whenever he takes up erotic motifs in his prose. This, in turn, has its source in his feeling of being guilty due to his masculine (that is, masochistic) nature. In other words, he is a guilty person for whom there is no redemption.

This feeling of guilt is intensified by the fact that the women whom - in the absence of any Law of the father - he makes substitute subjects of that Law, who behave cruelly towards him, at the same time are treated (by himself) as the object - and reason - of his own sexual desires. Thus, they are also the actual or potential object of his transgression. Therefore, while openly idolising them, he secretly despises them, too. His attitude towards women - and towards himself - is deeply ambivalent. It resembles a trap from which there is no escape.

Therefore, if Schulz the narrator, idolatrously worshiping women's figures, vicariously stages the operation of the Law, it has little in common with the Father's Law. Father's law was to be the basis for his confirmation as a subject in the eyes of himself and others. The law of women worshipped in an idolatrous way destroys his self-established male subjectivity. It is a quasi-law that replaces the authoritative obviousness of the father's Law with cruelty that destroys the male subject. Its consequences are tragic for the subject.

The Woman's Law, which appears in place of the Father's Law, is an apparent Law. It is a Law that only pretends to be a Law. But not because this law is made by women, but because it was given to them, or even imposed by force, by a masochistic male subject. Women themselves know nothing about this Law and their own role in it. No wonder their attitude towards this Law is characterised by a haughty, even royal indifference. In fact, they care little about the Law or the male subject itself. They are even irritated and angered by his idolatrous attitude towards them.

Women intuitively sense that they are only objects in this game, which is really only supposed to give satisfaction to the male subject. An eloquent testimony

²¹ This Law is expressed in the unconditional recognition of separation from the mother and the feeling associated with it that there are certain rules within sexual "games" that must not be violated. The subject then finds support for all questions and doubts in its own sense of Law.

to this female irritation is the cruel behaviour of the young seamstresses and Adela towards her father, who preaches his sublime tirades about ideal shapes of the female body.

Ultimately, the tragedy of the masochistic male subject comes from the fact that, by placing women where the father had previously been as the "subject of the Law", he linked women's enforcement of this Law with their own humiliation. He is negated in his existence by the women he idolatrously adores, he is reduced to nothingness²². At the same time, this annihilation is a necessary condition for him to stimulate his own sexuality. As a result, only by putting his libido at the service of the destructive powers of Thanatos – that is, by being humiliated by a woman – is he able to achieve sexual pleasure and at the same time recognize (her) Law. In the masochistic male subject, both of these moments – sexual ecstasy as a result of humiliation by a woman and submission to the Law – are closely intertwined. And because this whole "game" of idolatrous worship of women and self-humiliation was arranged by the man himself, his recognition of the Law is only apparent and must be repeated again and again. From now on, he can only continue this game of appearances indefinitely, pursuing his own strategy of filling the empty place left by his father (Law) with female characters he admires, without even asking them what their opinion on the matter is. This is how he would like to see them, it is his only chance to save himself and the world without the Father, in which he has not lived up to his role as a subject of the Law assigned to him by tradition.

This is also where Schulz the masochist differs from the medieval troubadour, who, while worshipping his Mistress and following her orders, did not in any way restore the father's Law in a substitute way. He accepted this Law as the Law of the Sovereign to which he was subject, as something obvious, and was therefore certain of his own subjectivity. Thus, by worshipping a woman, he already dominated her in the symbolic space, thus additionally sealing his own phantasmal power over her. By making her a sublime, unattainable, small object in his own fantasies, he imposed on the woman an image of her created by his own fantasy, to which she had to adjust herself.

In this way, he set a rigid phantasmal framework for the femininity she manifests. At the same time, this elevation of the woman and making her sexually unavailable was only fuel for the fantasies surrounding her. In these fantasies, he engaged in an endless pursuit of a female object inaccessible to him, thus obtaining for himself a kind of infinite phantasmal satisfaction. As a result, he

22 Gombrowicz captured this perfectly in his characterization of Schulz's personality: 'Bruno was a man who denied himself. I was a man who was looking for himself. He wanted destruction. I wanted realization. He was born a slave. I was born a master' (*W. Gombrowicz, Dziennik*, t. 3: 1961–1969, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2004, p. 11).

became somehow additionally convinced about his own masculinity. In short, the medieval troubadour had no problem accepting the father's Law and did not have to arrange it vicariously. His submissive knightly attitude towards women was not a substitute for this Law, but only a phantasmal complement.

Schulz, on the other hand, as the author of the drawings from *The Booke of Idolatry* and the narrator-son of his stories, worships women in a completely different way. The masculine attitude of knightly service typical of the tradition of courtly love, in which the woman occupies an exalted place in the marriage of a man, she turns into an attitude of slavish idolatry. Ladies who were objects of male cult in courtly love appeared – such as Oleńka in Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Potop* – as spiritual beings, fervently religious, wearing exquisite clothes. Their bodies seemed to have no meaning to the male subject. The beauty of their faces, breasts, hands, or legs mattered to the man only insofar as they were emanations of the beauty of their souls, though naturally in this way the man only sublimated his own sexual drive, unconsciously desiring them. However, the women who appear in Schulz's drawings flaunt the nakedness of their bodies, sometimes even intrusive sexuality, which shocks the men kneeling before them. But, at the same time, they act like a soulless effigies, tailor's mannequins, devoid of any emotions and feelings. Their faces show nothing more than sublime indifference and contempt. They are like limp golden calves, stretched out lazily on their beds and looking with some curiosity and irony at the men kneeling before them. They are cold goddesses with statuesque faces unimpressed by the men's loyal obedience.

The masochistic subject experiences this situation as a profound existential drama of self-negation, which is very real for him. It is true that he himself arranged this drama, imposing on the woman an attitude of self-humiliation and inflicting pain with a whip, but what is most real in this scene is the very need for this type of arrangement on his part. The real "problem" of the masochistic subject is located somewhere here: of the subject who can come to terms with himself only through brutal negation of himself by a woman, through his own humiliation and experience of pain.

At the same time, the moment of experiencing what is real is also recognizable on the side of the female "tormentor", in whom the masochistic subject tries to arouse fear. This fear is born in the tormentor as a result of her fear of what the masochist wants her to do. This is also the specific "revenge" of the masochistic subject – he feels his peculiar satisfaction and delight, seeing a female tormentor become fearful of what she is doing²³.

23 In the book mentioned above, Bruce Fink writes: "Often a partner must be pushed to the breaking point, to a point of intense anxiety, before he explosively expresses his will in the form of commands ('Stop!' for example). [...] And the Other must often first be made extremely anxious before he agrees to enunciate the law" – Fink, op. cit., p. 187. This description of a masochistic

But Schulz's drawings and short stories can also be looked at from a more extensive perspective, going beyond the individual dimension of the masochistic theatre that takes place there openly and covertly. This is the perspective of the irretrievable past, based on the father's Law of male Western culture, which has so far been supported by the gods of Judaism and Christianity. Male masochism is a convulsive act of this culture, and female law, which emerges at its ruins, is a temporary and apparent solution. A real alternative has not appeared just yet. It lies outside the traditional divisions into what is masculine and what is feminine.



performance clearly suggests that it is not just about pure conventional arrangement in which no one takes their role seriously. This gives us no answer to the question why exactly the masochist wants to make the Other afraid. It seems that, from the perspective of a masochist, it is about a kind of revenge, getting back at the Other – the tormentor.

Piotr Sitkiewicz: Bruno, Son of Franz

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Reviewers of several exhibitions in which Bruno Schulz participated, as well as critics writing about *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, persistently searched for influences shaping the work of the newly discovered artist¹. A few names appear a bit more frequently than others: Félicien Rops, Francisco Goya, Alfred Kubin, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Witold Gombrowicz, Michał Choromański, Adolf Rudnicki, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka. That's right – Franz Kafka. Interestingly, although literary scholars have looked at this relationship many times (a whole shelf of studies in the Schulzological library proves it), no one was particularly surprised. It was confirmed to be correct, even if its sense was fiercely denied; still, it seemed obvious to everyone. Was it really?

The author of the review *Dziwny poeta* [A Strange Poet], published in “Głos Poranny” in 1934, wrote: “[Schulz’s] strongest affinity is with Franz Kafka, an already dead, great prose writer – a fantasist whose works – as far as I know – have not been translated into Polish, yet”². This is the first known comparison of Schulz and Kafka. Naturally, most of the mentions regarding the similarities

1 On the pre-war reception of Schulz's works, see my book: *Bruno Schulz i krytycy. Recepcja twórczości Brunona Schulza w latach 1921–1939*, Gdańsk 2018; article by U. Makowska “Dziwna awersja”. O wystawach Schulza, “Schulz/Forum” 13, 2019, p. 5–34; as well as *Kalendarz życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza* (www.schulzforum.pl). Biographical facts about Schulz are mainly based on Jerzy Ficowski's work (*Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002), as well as on *Księga listów* (B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for printing by Ficowski, supplemented by Stanisław Danecki, Gdańsk 2016), and on the calendar of Schulz's life; while the facts about Kafka are based – among other works – on the following: Łukasz Musiał, *Wstęp*, in: F. Kafka, *Wybór prozy*, prefaced and edited by Ł. Musiał, translated by L. Czyżewski, R. Karst, Ł. Musiał et al., Wrocław 2018, BN II, 263; Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Opowieść biograficzna*, translated by T. Zabłudowski, Warszawa 1982; English translation: idem, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, transl. G. Humphreys Roberts and R. Winston, New York: Schocken Books, 1960); a historical essay by Benjamin Balint, *Ostatni proces Kafki* (translated by K. Kurek, Warszawa 2019; English original: idem, *Kafka's Last Trial: The Strange Case of a Literary Legacy*, London: Picador, 2018), as well as on online sources (www.kafka.org and www.kafka-research.ox.ac.uk). This article is an extended version of the paper presented on November 16, 2019 during the 4th Schulz Days in Gdańsk.

2 Sz. G., *Dziwny poeta. Za kontuarem cynamonowych sklepów Bruno Schulza*, “Głos Poranny” 1934, no. 55 (socio-literary supplement), p. 3.

between these writers appeared after the publication of Kafka's *The Trial* in Bruno Schulz's translation by the publishing house Rój³. Perhaps it was only then that many reviewers first heard about the Prague fiction writer who had been dead for over a decade. Thus, in 1936, Tadeusz Breza wrote about Schulz's affinity with Kafka as "a classic eulogist of [...] crypto- or meta-reality"⁴. In 1937, Józef Nacht in *Wywiad drastyczny* [Drastic Interview], commenting on the "apparent" similarity of both authors, pointed out that "Franz Kafka's style is a style of a legal code, it is purely formal, blinding prose, readers do not see the plot, they can at most (or not at all) feel it, understand it, Kafka's prose lacks the images that Bruno Schulz paints perhaps in a strange and abnormal way, but realistically nonetheless"⁵. Leon Piwiński stated that the atmosphere of *The Trial* "will remind Polish readers of the work of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops*, who [...] brilliantly translated the work of a writer related to him"⁶. Artur Sandauer announced that both Schulz and Kafka "created a type of story where the action is guided not by the fate of the characters, but, as in poetry, by the internal and necessary logic of images, and often even verbal and sound associations"⁷. In 1938, Marian Promiński called Kafka a writer of the same mental inclinations albeit with less artistic imagination with a higher concept of life", and claimed that Schulz drew fully from Kafka's moods, especially from the novels *The Trial* and *The Castle*⁸. Michał Chmielowiec talked about "certain analogies" connecting both writers—fantasists⁹. Józef Czechowicz looked for similarities in the type of fantasy they wrote¹⁰, and Bolesław Dudziński stated that Schulz's style "could be most accurately put next to the style of certain novels by Franz Kafka, the difference being that the unreal world of this writer is subordinated to a certain philosophical concept, a certain system of recognising and understanding being – while in Schulz's work we find only interesting thematic ideas, subjected to the rigours of rather formal regularity, and not pretending to be the key to metaphysical mysteries"¹¹. Finally, in 1939, Stefan Napierski, in the notes to his part of *Dwugłos o Schulzu* [Double Voice on Schulz], wrote about reminiscences from Kafka, who was "very much overrated,

3 See F. Kafka, *Proces*, translation and afterword by B. Schulz, Warsaw 1936. Reprinted afterword, e.g., in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 7: *Komentarze krytyczne*, editorial concept by W. Bolecki, comments and notes by M. Wójcik, linguistic ed. P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 43–46.

4 T. Breza, *Pisarz, którego dręczy sobowtór*, "Kurier Poranny" 1936, no. 357, p. 9–10.

5 J. Nacht, *Wywiad drastyczny. (Rozmowa z Brunonem Schulzem)*, "Nasza Opinia" 1937, no. 77, p. 5.

6 L. Piwiński, *Literatura niemiecka*, "Rocznik Literacki" 1936 (1937), p. 147.

7 A. Sandauer, *Bruno Schulz – poeta sofista*, "Chwila" 1937, no. 6561, p. 10.

8 M. Promiński, *Nowości literackie*, "Sygnały" 1938, no. 40, p. 5.

9 M. Chmielowiec, *Zdarzenia bezdomne*, "Kultura" 1938, no. 13, p. 5.

10 J. Czechowicz, Truchanowski i towarzysze. *Uwagi marginesowe*, "Pion" 1938, no. 35, p. 2.

11 B. Dudziński, [review of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*], "Naprzód" 1938, no. 96, p. 2 (section: "Nowe książki").

but who could once have been considered a pioneer; among many ‘dangerous’ absurdities, I found a distinct one: a father turned into a crayfish and finally eaten by his family, another time a man turns into a cockroach, the family locks him in a separate room, feeds him and at the same time is ashamed of him”¹². Clearly, already in the interwar period the opinions on how close Schulz and Kafka were related were divided. But there are surprisingly many interesting references to this subject.

An article by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, published in “Pamiętnik Literacki” (signed with her maiden name, Prokopówna), sheds some light on the interwar reception of Kafka’s work in Poland¹³. Contrary to what we might think about the lack of popularity of the writer from Prague among Polish readers, his works, as well as his death, resonated quite strongly in Poland. Even an obituary appeared, which was at the same time the first recorded mention of Kafka in the Polish language. This obituary, published in the Zionist monthly “Nowe Życie”, dedicated to Jewish literature, science and art, and edited by Majer Bałaban, was about the death of “a well-known short story writer and a German poet from Prague”, who “left behind several volumes of short stories and poetry characterised by a great dose of cheerfulness” (*sic!*)¹⁴. The second text dedicated to Kafka, *Franciszek Kafka. Wspomnienie pozgonne* [Franz Kafka. Posthumous memoirs] by Oskar Baum, was published on 23 August of the same year by Cracow’s “Nowy Dziennik”. It was about the death of Franz Kafka, one of the most outstanding expressionists in German literature, “a poet from Prague, known by few, but considered by them one of the greatest masters of the contemporary German prose”¹⁵. This was quite a quick reaction, considering that Kafka died on 3 June 1924, and information did not spread as quickly as it does today. The article was also very accurate, too, countering the popular belief that on the day of Kafka’s death few people had heard of him. According to Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, by 1936 there were a total of 27, and by 1939 – as many as 50 – references and articles published in the Polish press, in which Kafka’s name appeared (it seems to me that this number is still too humble). Is this a lot, or not that much? In my opinion, the number of references must have been substantial. Especially because many of them are really interesting – for example the texts by Wanda Kragen or Izydor Berman¹⁶.

¹² S. Napierski, *Dwugłos o Schulzu*, “Ateneum” 1939, no. 1, p. 157–158.

¹³ E. Prokopówna, *Kafka w Polsce międzywojennej*, “Pamiętnik Literacki” Issue 76, 1985, vol. 4, p. 89–132. The text contains a bibliography of Kafka’s translations and texts devoted to him.

¹⁴ *Franz Kafka* [obituary], “Nowe Życie” 1924, no. 3, p. 439.

¹⁵ O. Baum, *Franciszek Kafka. Wspomnienie pozgonne*, translated into Polish by i.d.-r., “Nowy Dziennik” 1924, no. 190, p. 6–7.

¹⁶ Especially of the latter, such as the exhaustive description of Kafka’s biography and previously published works, in the article *Franciszek Kafka*, “Miesięcznik Żydowski” 1932, no. 7/8, p. 96–107.

The translation made by Schulz, who – according to Wanda Kragen – was predestined for this kind of work¹⁷, was not the first text by Kafka that was made available to Polish readers. Already in 1925, four short stories were published in “Nowy Dziennik” (*Up in the Gallery, Bachelor’s Ill Luck, Clothes, The Refusal*), translated by Ewa Salzowa¹⁸. The first major text by Kafka in Polish was *A Country Doctor*, translated by Izydor Berman, printed in 1936 by the Warsaw “Studio”¹⁹. In the same year, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” published a fragment of *The Trial (At the Lawyer’s)*, and soon also the entire novel²⁰. Unfortunately, that was all. No other work by Kafka aroused the interest of Polish publishers until the end of the 1930s. This is to some extent explained by Izydor Berman in a text published in 1937 on the occasion of the publication of Kafka’s collective works in Germany: “Some writers – especially the more difficult ones – sometimes have to wait quite a long time for popularity and a greater number of readers. [...] There are numerous reasons for the capricious fate of literary success, the most important of which is the so-called ‘zeitgeist’, an atmosphere favourable only to certain authors and the worlds they represent. The zeitgeist is again driven by complex sociological conditions. These conditions, which would enable a wider circle of readers (even if following a fad) of Franz Kafka’s books, have apparently not yet been met. The novel *The Trial*, the only one translated into Polish (by Bruno Schulz), has not found many readers, and even only a handful of experts and critics”²¹. A handful was not enough to invest in further translations.

Unfortunately, we must agree with Berman. Let us not be fooled by the relatively large number of mentions and reviews – Kafka was not read, known, or liked in Poland for a long time. Until the publication of the translation of *The Trial*, texts on Kafka appeared only in the Jewish press of a Zionist profile – in the Lviv “Chwila”, in the Kraków “Nowy Dziennik”, in the Warsaw “Miesięcznik Żydowski” and “Nowe Życie”, in the Warsaw-Łódź “Opinia”, but mainly in newspapers published in the areas of the former Austrian partition. Also “Wiadomości Literackie”, which in 1927 and 1928 published reviews of *The Castle* and *America*, was largely a magazine of the Jewish intelligentsia (interestingly, “Wiadomości Literackie”, unlike “Chwila” or “Nowy Dziennik”, did not expose the Jewishness of

17 W. Kragen, *Twórczość Franciszka Kafki*, “Chwila” 1936, no. 6238, p. 10.

18 F. Kafka, *Szkice. (Na galerii. Los kawalera. Suknie. Odprawa)*, translated by E. Salzowa, “Nowy Dziennik” 1925, no. 203, p. 5–6.

19 Idem, *Lekarz wiejski*, translated by I. Berman, “Studio” 1936, no. 9, p. 316–322.

20 Idem, *U adwokata*, translated by B. Schulz, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 8/9, p. 157–158.

21 I. Berman, *Szkice i pamiętniki Fr. Kafki (z okazji wydania zbiorowych dzieł pisarza)*, “Chwila” 1937, no. 6663, p. 9–10.

Kafka²²). Bruno Schulz cooperated with two of these magazines – “Wiadomości Literackie” and “Chwila”. Therefore, he belonged to the circle of people who not only knew Kafka’s work, but who were also the first to recognize his talent and felt inclined to include him in the ranks of the most outstanding authors of the new century. It was only after the publication of the Polish translation of *The Trial* that mentions and reviews of Kafka’s works also appeared in magazines outside the circle of the Jewish intelligentsia.

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We would not know how Schulz came into contact with Kafka’s work if it weren’t for Adam Ważyk. We would probably still make assumptions only. From Schulz’s letter to Rudolf Ottenbreit, written on 18 December 1934, we would know that he was looking for a new author who would dazzle and move him, because he had not found anybody for a long time, since Rilke, Kafka and Thomas Mann²³. A long time. Did he perhaps get to know Kafka’s work in Vienna? That would make for a lovely story! Schulz, a refugee in the years 1914–1918, had a lot of time to come across a debut collection of short stories titled *Betrachtung*, published in Leipzig in 1912 (dated 1913) by Rowohlt Verlag, or one of the short stories published in the “Der jüngste Tag” series by the Leipzig-based Kurt Wolff Verlag: *Der Heizer. Ein Fragment* from 1913, *Die Verwandlung* from 1915 and *Das Urteil* from 1916, and even one of the stories published in magazines such as “Die Weissen Blätter”, “Der Jude”, “Hyperion” or “Bohemia” (but would it be possible for him to get them in Vienna during the Great War?). When he visited Vienna again in 1923, he could also buy Kafka’s second collection of short stories – *Ein Landarzt* from 1919, published in Munich and Leipzig by Kurt Wolff Verlag, the story *In der Strafkolonie*, published by Kurt Wolff in the “Der jüngste Tag” series in 1919, and further stories from literary magazines.

We could wonder if it was possible for Schulz to discover Kafka’s stories and novels in the bookshop of Mundek Pilpla’s father, but only half-heartedly, because the shop sold popular fiction rather than hard-to-find editions of Kafka, a writer – as we would say today – who was niche and not easy to read. So might he perhaps have reached for Kafka in the library of the “Jewish House”, run by the Drohobych Zionist circle? This would seem uncertain, too– Shalom Lindenbaum argues that at least until 1928, there were no works by Kafka in

22 See A. Prędski, *Arcydzieło Franza Kafki*, “Wiadomości Literackie” 1927, no. 38, p. 2; I. Berman, “Ameryka” Kafki, “Wiadomości Literackie” 1928, no. 36, p. 3. Both reviews – which should be emphasized – are very accurate in their assessment.

23 Letter from Bruno Schulz to Rudolf Ottenbreit dated 18 December 1934, in: B. Schulz, *Księga Listów*, p. 63.

the collections of this library²⁴. Still, Stanisław Weingarten had the original edition of *The Trial* in his book catalogue (as well as the Schulz's translation)²⁵. Perhaps one of his friends, up to date with the latest publications, told Schulz about Kafka? If not Weingarten, then it was perhaps Izydor Berman, a writer, translator, critic, expert and populariser of German literature, born around 1898 in Lviv, who not only very favourably reviewed *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, but also corresponded with Schulz in 1937 regarding the publication of the German-language story *Die Heimkehr*, and who wanted to recommend him to the Viennese publishing house Oesterreichische Korrespondenz, which looked for Polish authors worth being translated into German²⁶. It was then that Berman proposed that Schulz's story could be sent to Thomas Mann or – here he goes! – to Max Brod. Therefore, earlier he might have also recommended Kafka to him, of whom he was an admirer, translator and advocate. Or was it perhaps Deborah Vogel who told Schulz about Kafka? A woman who was well-educated, well-read, had travelled all over the world, and knew the Jewish intelligentsia very well.

Either of these possibilities could be true. But Schulz most likely became acquainted with Kafka's work through Władysław Riff. In *Kwestia gustu* [A Matter of Taste] from 1966, Adam Ważyk wrote about his meeting with Schulz and Riff in a guesthouse in Zakopane, which belonged to Riff's relatives. This student of Polish studies who had a serious case of tuberculosis and heart disease lived in the guesthouse for a whole year. Ważyk pointed out that Riff had many German books: "He praised Franz Kafka, a writer about whom I haven't heard anything yet"²⁷. This meeting took place in 1926. In December 1927, Władysław Riff died in the same guesthouse in Zakopane. Therefore, if Ważyk's memory serves him right, this young man recognised Kafka's genius much earlier than many experienced critics. Which of Kafka's books, apart from those mentioned above, could he read or even have in his library? That could be the collection of short stories titled *Ein Hungerkünstler* published in 1924 by the Berlin publishing house Die Schmiede, on which Kafka was still working on his deathbed, as well as two novels completed and edited by Max Brod – *Der Prozess*, published in 1925 by Die Schmiede, and *Das Schloss*, published a year later by Kurt Wolff. He could have got to know *Amerika* already after his meeting with Ważyk, because it was published only in 1927 by Kurt Wolff.

24 S. Lindenbaum, *Lektury Schulza*, "Midrasz" 2003, no. 3, http://www.midrasz.home.pl/2003/mar/mar03_01.html (retrieved: 12.01.2020).

25 Jerzy Ficowski writes about it in *Księga obrazów* (Gdańsk 2012, p. 513).

26 Letter from Izydor Berman to Bruno Schulz dated 13 December 1937, in: B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, p. 291–292, 419–420.

27 A. Ważyk, *Kwestia gustu*, Warszawa 1966, p. 112.

It seems that this sickly man in his twenties, who lived on the outskirts of Europe, was quite well-read. And that seems the most incredible thing for me. We need to realize what Kafka's place was at the literary Parnassus at that time. Riff was one of only a few hundred owners of Kafka's books, the print run of which usually did not exceed a thousand copies and which were lying on the shelves in bookshops waiting for readers to discover them. Kafka's first books, published during his lifetime, sold poorly. Their meagre success is evidenced by the fact that in the first year his debut collection of short stories was sold in the number of only 258 out of 800 copies, and in the year of Kafka's death (1924), the book was still available in its first edition. The critical reception did not look any better. After Kafka's death, Max Brod – a famous and influential writer – had initially found it difficult to make publishers interested in his friend's novels. The small avant-garde publishing house Die Schmiede, which had published *A Hunger Artist* a year earlier, agreed to work with the earlier one, too. Kurt Wolff, a visionary publisher and Brod's friend, agreed to publish *The Castle* and was one of the first to not only recognize Kafka's talent, but to invest his own money in it. However, it was not a profitable investment. Despite the efforts of Brod – so much more efficient in terms of marketing than the writer himself (whom Wolff claimed to be the worst author in terms of self-promotion he had ever met), Kafka's books did not sell, even despite the better reviews the writer enjoyed after his death. The situation changed slightly in the second half of the 1930s, when the Berlin publishing house Schocken bought the rights to Kafka's literary works and began publishing his *Collected Works*, and numerous translations into foreign languages appeared (in the USA, Italy, France and, of course, in Poland). Apparently, it was still not the best time to publish Jewish authors. In Germany, both they and their publishing houses became blacklisted. In 1939, Max Brod escaped to Palestine with a suitcase full of his friend's manuscripts. Kafka's world is lost in ghettos and concentration camps.

When we read texts about Kafka in the pre-war Polish press, we get the impression that even if before the outbreak of World War II Kafka had not been appreciated by Polish readers, he still gained the respect he deserved in the world. "Wiadomości Literackie" wrote at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s that Kafka's *The Castle* "remains the pinnacle of European literary prose, a masterpiece that no nation's literature could boast before"²⁸. Unfortunately, this announcement of Kafka's triumph seems a bit premature, as the reception of his works was approached by Izydor Berman in 1932 in a different way: "Franz Kafka's novels *Der Prozess*, *Das Schloss* and *Amerika* were understood by only a few people. They did not resonate more broadly and did not cause (as could be expected)

28 A. Prędski, op. cit., p. 2.

any unrest among the literary world, such sensitive to new forms of expression. It is hard to accept that only the difficulty of reading can be guilty of the fact that Kafka has so far been known only to a select few. Rather, it seems that calmer and more balanced times should come, with great longing and deeper need of faith, so that Kafka's works could become food for many"²⁹. It is hard not to agree with the author of these words, who proved yet another time his insight bordering on prophetism – only a fraction of 1,500 published copies of *The Castle* were initially sold. In the 1930s, few were willing to repeat Berman's words: "the time will come when we will be proud of Kafka to the world, like of Hein, like of Spinoza"³⁰. Berman wanted to bring this time forward also on his own backyard, but meanwhile "no one has heard of him in Poland". Polish critics unanimously overlooked the publication of *The Trial* and livened up only after the publication of *The Castle*, but in fact they "detected" Kafka only after the Polish translation of his first novel was published.

He was unheard-of, yet some heard of him. For example, Władysław Riff, a student living in Zakopane, and Bruno Schulz, a teacher of drawing from Drohobych – only two years after Kafka's death. We do not know for sure whether it was Schulz who recommended Kafka to Riff, but at the end of the day it does not really matter – it is important that they both knew his work already in 1926. This undoubtedly proves their unique taste and sensitivity to literature, and their foresight, which from today's perspective seems almost incredible, but which – as we can see – was really the case. It needs to be emphasized clearly: although at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s Kafka was not a writer with an established reputation in Poland or in Europe, he had a modest group of his zealous followers, which over time reached a critical mass enabling the explosion of his international fame. A few years after his death, this group was limited to the circles of young, assimilated Jewish intelligentsia with Zionist sympathies – people who were educated and familiar with the latest contemporary art, reading world literature in original versions (which was nothing exceptional for educated Poles who were officially citizens of foreign powers just a few years earlier). Eugenia Prokop-Janiec reminds us that Franz Kafka also belonged to the same circles. That is why Polish journalists and commentators presented him as a Jewish writer – "as an author closed in the circle of Jewish 'cursed problems', determined by the culture of his own nation, understood only in the context of the condition and tradition of his community"³¹.

²⁹ I. Berman, *Nowele Kafki*, "Chwila" 1932, no. 4684, p. 9.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 10.

³¹ E. Prokopówna, op. cit., p. 97.

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Schulz therefore belonged to a small community of Kafka's friends and followers – even at a time when the writer's work did not go beyond the narrow circle of the *conoscenti*. When writing *The Cinnamon Shops*, he may have known all of Kafka's novels and many of his short stories; when he was preparing *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* for print, he was probably familiar with Kafka's diary and correspondence. From Józefina Szelińska's letter to Jerzy Ficowski dated 5 November 1967, we might learn that Schulz had at least three books by Kafka – *The Trial*, which served as the basis for Szelińska's translation, *The Castle* and a collection of short stories. As Szelińska writes, she translated the following texts from the collection: *The Hunter Gracchus* and *The Bucket Rider*, so it could have been the 1931 edition titled *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*, edited by Max Brod and Hans Joachim Schoeps, published by Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag and containing Kafka's previously unprinted stories and aphorisms. It was Schulz who came up with the idea of publishing a translation of *The Trial* – Józefina Szelińska wrote about it directly to Ficowski. She also outlined the context for the undertaking: "It was all about the simplest thing – to publish a book through Kister [in "Rój"] and also to get something out of it. We received 1,000 zlotys, I got 600, and Bruno got 400, it was a fair split, because without his inspiration there would be no translation, and Bruno really needed the money"³². From Schulz's letter we know that it was he who made the authorial correction of the proofs (even a fragment of this correction remained, where we can easily identify his handwriting)³³. The matter was kept secret, to such an extent that in 1984 Szelińska believed that only she and Ficowski knew the truth. And it was already an open secret. As it turns out, many people had already realised that Schulz could not have been the translator of *The Trial*. Artur Sandauer knew about it (and even announced it on television!), Emil Górski knew about it, and admitted it in his recollection of Schulz sent to Ficowski³⁴. Stefan Otwinowski also knew and, having seen the manuscript of the translation of *The Trial* in the printing

32 Letter from Józefina Szelińska to Jerzy Ficowski from 5 September 1967 (Jerzy Ficowski archive in Polish National Library). I would like to thank Prof. Jerzy Kandzior for sharing this correspondence.

33 Galley proof of the beginning of the chapter *The Whip-man*, in the collection of the State National Library in Lviv, archive of "Sygnały", columns 51–55. NB, these are minor and few corrections, so there is no question of Schulz giving Szelińska's translation the mark of his own infallible style only during the galley proof.

34 E. Górski's recollection in the book: B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty, wspomnienia o pisarzu*, collected and ed. J. Ficowski, Kraków 1984, p. 72.

house, was convinced that Schulz was not the translator (because he was familiar with the manuscripts of his stories)³⁵.

Nevertheless, ever since the day of the publication of this book, Schulz's name had become attached to Kafka's. Reviewers who wrote about the novel usually did not forget to mention who the translator was. This means that Schulz's name could have served as a certain recommendation for the little-known author. Still, Schulz himself contributed to the fact that their names are often said in one breath, thanks to the afterword to *The Trial*, which is widely perceived not only as one of the most interesting and insightful interpretations of Kafka's work in Polish, but also as a kind of *credo* of the Schulz, repeatedly interpreted by literature scholars. He wrote: "Creativity was not a goal itself for him, but a way to gain the highest truth, to find the right path in life"; "Kafka's gaze – fascinated once and for all by the religious meaning of things that goes beyond life – explores with never-satisfied inquisitiveness the structure, organization, and deep orders of this hidden reality, traverses the border where human life comes into contact with divine being"; "he achieves the dual character of his reality with the help of a kind of pseudo-realism"; "Kafka's books are not an allegorical image, a lecture or an exegesis of doctrine, they are an independent poetic reality, rounded, closed on all sides, justified and resting in itself. Beyond its mystical allusions and religious intuitions, the work has a poetic life of its own – ambiguous, unfounded, inexhaustible by any interpretations". There is that almost prophetic passage, too: "It is the tragedy of this fate that this life, climbing with desperate zeal towards the light of faith, does not find it, and, despite everything, disappears into darkness. This explains the last will of the author who died prematurely, condemning his entire literary works to destruction"³⁶.

Is anyone surprised, then, that even the first readers of Schulz's stories saw similarities to Kafka's works? And weren't the clear similarities of certain motifs or plot solutions an encouragement to continue searching? Moreover, the resemblance to Kafka, according to the admirers of Schulz's prose, could have helped promote the Polish writer abroad. This was Artur Sandauer's belief when he wrote *Introduction to Schulz*, published in "Les Lettres Nouvelles" on 8 July 1959, as a supplement to the first translation of Schulz's prose into French: "Both are Jews and both come from the imperial-royal Austria; both have a similar combination of biblical tradition and German culture; finally, both of them move from reality to myth. They even share some tricks, and the transformation of Schulz's Father reminds one of the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa"³⁷. Other scholars add more to this list of similarities; let us recall a few of them. What both

35 K. Miklaszewski, *Zatrącenie się w Schulzu. Historia pewnej fascynacji*, Warszawa 2009, p. 118.

36 B. Schulz, *Posłowie*, in: F. Kafka, op. cit., passim.

37 A. Sandauer, *Wprowadzenie do Schulza*, in: idem, *Zebrane pisma krytyczne*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1981, p. 733.

writers have in common is also their belonging to the Jewish community, with all its cultural, religious and historical baggage, as well as to one literary generation. “They also undoubtedly have in common the understanding of art – as an expression of Metaphysics”, adds Prokop-Janiec. “They were also brought closer together by modernistic affinities”³⁸. Yet that is not all – Marcel Reich-Ranicki emphasizes that in case of both writers “the key to understanding their works is the attitude towards the father”³⁹. Witold Nawrocki notes that they both lived in cities that were “specific centres of magical and mystical thinking”⁴⁰, and Wojciech Owczarski argues – rightly emphasizing that their affinity is both justified and questionable – that they share a “similar type of imagination”, “images of labyrinths, winding streets and never-ending rooms”, “oneiric quality as the main principle of world creation”, metaphors of time and space, “the phantasm of being an animal” and expressionist roots, he also gives very convincing quotes revealing similarities between Schulz’s and Kafka’s prose (“I lived from day to day without worrying about tomorrow, confident in my talent of a hungry man,” writes Schulz)⁴¹. It is also hard to miss the protagonists in Schulz’s stories and Kafka’s *The Trial* have the same name.

It is not a coincidence that in the same period when Sandauer recommended Schulz to the French (1959), a new edition of *The Trial* was published in Poland, translated by Schulz/Szelińska (1957) and then editions of *The Castle* (1958) followed translated by Krzysztof Radziwiłł and Kazimierz Truchanowski. A selection of stories was translated by Juliusz Kydryński (titled *Wyrok* [Judgement], 1958), and also a new, collected edition of both Schulz’s books as published with a preface by Sandauer (1957). After years of exile, Schulz returned to Poland in the midst of a fashion for existentialism, Kafka and Jewish literature. And he headed away, to the West, too. This attempt to promote Schulz through Kafka was immediately noticed by Witold Gombrowicz, who was not convinced, though, whether it would not be a disservice to Schulz. He wrote in *Dziennik* [Diary]: “His affinity to Kafka may either pave the way for him, or close it. If they say that he is just another cousin, he would be lost”⁴². To be recognized as an epigone – that was Gombrowicz’s greatest fear. When he was fighting more and more effectively for recognition and fame in the West, the attention of readers (not so inclined to be interested in the same Polish authors for a longer time) was suddenly diverted

38 E. Prokopówna, op. cit., p. 93–94.

39 M. Reich-Ranicki, *Bruno Schulz. Polski Kafka?*, in: idem, *Najpierw żyć, potem igrać*, Wrocław 2005, p. 73.

40 W. Nawrocki, *Bruno Schulz i ekspresjonizm*, “Życie Literackie” 1976, no. 43, p. 7.

41 W. Owczarski, *Schulz i Kafka*, in: *Poetyka egzystencji. Franz Kafka na progu XXI wieku*, ed. E. Kasperki, T. Mackiewicz, Warszawa 2004, p. 257.

42 W. Gombrowicz, *Dzieła*, vol. 9: *Dziennik 1961–1966*, Kraków 1989, p. 7.

by Schulz, who had been supposedly announced by Kafka, and, to Gombrowicz's dismay, was sometimes presented as an inspiration for his own literary efforts⁴³.

Czesław Karkowski's preoccupation with the impact the promotion of Schulz in the West as a second Kafka could have on the Polish writer's position (if they cast him in the role of an epigone and imitator) seems exaggerated to me⁴⁴. Foreign readers and critics accepted this comparison eagerly, but they never used it to harm Schulz. In their eyes, comparison with Kafka did not negate Schulz's originality and independence. It all happened as Gombrowicz had predicted: "If, however, they notice a specific glow, his own light emanating from him, like from a phosphorescent insect, then he will be ready to smoothly enter their imagination, already processed by Kafka and his family... and then the ecstasies of epicures will throw him into the air"⁴⁵. This similarity was rather established by a certain community of origin, fate, artistic and philosophical patterns, and sensitivities, than the precursor-follower relationship.

The affinity between Schulz and Kafka was even indicated by the text on the cover of the English 1963 edition of *The Cinnamon Shops* translated by Celina Wieniewska⁴⁶. Later it was solidified, for example by Isaac Singer (in an article titled "A Polish Franz Kafka"), Serge Fauchereau (who draws numerous parallels and calls the two writers closest relatives), or Michel Faber (who calls Schulz "comparable to Kafka, but more eccentric, less gloomy")⁴⁷. In any case, a glance at the bibliography of texts devoted to Schulz's work is enough to realise how important this relationship is for authors from outside of Poland. Above all, comparisons to Kafka, Babel, Chagall, and Singer emphasized Schulz's position in the group of outstanding Jewish authors, but also helped to place him in a context other than just that related to family and immediate social surroundings (incomprehensible in the West) – in the context of great phenomena of contemporary art.

Artur Sandauer drew attention to the differences between these writers later in his text introducing Schulz to French literary elites: "Here is Kafka's world

43 Cf. article by P. Millati, *Schulz and Gombrowicz. Na marginesie książki "Gombrowicz. Ja, geniusz" Klementyny Suchanow*, "Schulz/Forum" 10, 2017, p. 125–136.

44 C. Karkowski, *W 60. rocznicę śmierci Brunona Schulza. Meandry literackiej sławy*, "Przegląd Polski", 15 November 2002, p. 11.

45 W. Gombrowicz, op. cit., p. 7.

46 "Schulz is usually compared to Kafka, although in some fragments his prose resembles Chagall's paintings" (as cited in: K. Kaszorek, "Polish Kafka" w Ameryce, czyli co o Schulzu pisali pierwsi amerykańscy badacze jego twórczości, "Schulz/Forum" 9, 2017, p. 58).

47 See I.B. Singer, *A Polish Franz Kafka*, "The New York Times Book Review", 9 July 1978; S. Fauchereau, *Fantazmatyczny świat Brunona Schulza. Wokół "Xięgi bałwochwalczej"*, translated by P. Tarasewicz, Gdańsk 2018; M. Faber, *My Top 5*, "The Herald", 14 July 2001. See on this topic: Z. Ziemann, *It's a writer's book. Anglojęzyczni pisarze czytają Schulza (na potęgę)*, "Schulz/Forum" 11, 2018, p. 153–166; and also: Z. Ziemann *Polish Kafka?*, in this issue of "Schulz/Forum".

heading towards the Good, while Schulz's world is fascinated by the Evil. One is an ascetic, the other – a sensualist. An artist is – according to Schulz – a fallen monk who, succumbing to bodily temptations, betrayed his high spiritual calling: hence Kafka's sober style corresponds to Schulz's verbal exuberance⁴⁸. Exactly, style – this is where we can see perhaps the greatest difference in the works of both writers. Kafka's style is characterized by – as Rolf Fieguth puts it – “restraint of linguistic means”⁴⁹. In Kafka's works – contrary to Schulz's – “not linguistic and stylistic plane of expression comes to the fore of aesthetic reception, but [...] a double subject layer”⁵⁰. And although Fieguth states that Kafka was not interested in “working with words”, “rebuilding German stylistics” and “linguistic effects of alienation”⁵¹, still – as Hannah Arendt says – his work is “the purest German prose in the entire century”⁵². His fiction is smooth, stiff, spare, transparent, without unnecessary luxury and redundancy – it has a strict, almost official style (this impeccable German dialect is used by all Kafka's characters, even alewives and peasants).

And isn't this innovative way of approaching language as a material paradoxically at the same time an important similarity between the two writers? Although Schulz's stylistically exuberant prose is in this respect extremely different from Kafka's writing (what is important – the translation by Szelińska/Schulz takes into account this difference – it is not Kafka rewritten in Schulz's style, but Kafka treated with respect, which is confirmed by Fieguth, and also – which in turn is backed up by Łukasz Musiał – with a unique ability to “render the stuffy, almost claustrophobic atmosphere of the original version”⁵³), both of them faced similar accusations from their opponents – that as Jews they poached on the fertile lands of the language that welcomed them, that they – as Jews – had appropriated other people's property, and that efficient imitation of a language that was culturally alien to them resembled aping (which is confirmed by the first reviews of Kafka's and Schulz's works, which refer *en bloc* to Jewish authors writing in German or Polish).

However, even the obvious similarities between Schulz and Kafka are reduced by Schulzologists to meaningless coincidences. Ficowski writes: “No metamorphosis appears like *a deus ex machina*, like the sudden and out-of-nowhere transformation of the student Samsa from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. There, it is an inexplicable judgment of unknown powers. For Schulz, every transformation

48 A. Sandauer, op. cit., p. 733.

49 R. Fieguth, *Bruno Schulz i jego cicha krytyka Kafki*, in: idem, *Poezja w fazie krytycznej i inne studia z literatury polskiej*, Izabelin 2000, p. 290–291.

50 Ibidem, p. 290.

51 As cited in: B. Balint, op. cit., p. 277.

52 Ibidem, p. 295.

53 Ł. Musiał, op. cit., p. CCVII.

is a result, a consequence. It occurs at a critical moment when internal tension reaches its climax. Then a new quality is born, and new dynamics are revealed. Their hidden, embryonic state is known to us, given by Schulz as a genetic explanation for the new phenomenon”⁵⁴. Fieguth states that the “obvious allusion to Kafka’s famous *The Metamorphosis*” is not “only an intertextual tribute to Kafka”, but “a discreet demonstration of the distinctiveness of his own poetics” (in Schulz’s works all metamorphoses are ostentatiously provisional and reversible). Moreover, “unlike Kafka’s Józef K., Schulz’s characters do not passively experience the intrusion of metaphysics into their lives, but create their own trivial, human metaphysics. Nor are they, as in Kafka’s work, surrounded by a fictional creation – the presented world. Schulz built a rather ‘fiction-breaking’ parallel between the author’s literary constructions and the father’s fantastic ideas”⁵⁵. Even the similarity of the father figures in the works of both writers (an analogy emphasised by many researchers) can be rationally refuted. Robert Kostrzewa argues that the artistic implementations of this motif are different: “Judging, punishing, passing inhuman sentences, cursing and building dams of strangeness, Bendemann [the character of Kafka’s *The Judgement*], and Jakub, quiet, torn by metaphysical passions, always willing to experiment creatively. Both are creators: one of the world of horror, fear and mental oppression, the other of ‘regions of great heresy’”⁵⁶. Wojciech Owczarski claims that Kafka’s father, as revealed most fully in *Letter to His Father*, is a destroyer, a father who is too strong, while Schulz’s father is too weak a father, unable to ensure his son’s safety (but ultimately both writers share a rebellion against their fathers, and even a kind of father complex)⁵⁷.

The differences between Kafka and Schulz are arranged by some scholars into striking antitheses. Ficowski writes: “Schulz is a constructor of a reality – of an asylum which wonderfully ‘enhances the taste of the world’; Kafka is a citizen and glossator of the world of horror, an ascetic hermit, waiting for a miracle of justice that will never happen. Schulz – a metaphysician, dressed in a diversity of colours, Kafka – a mystic in a hair shirt of worldly renunciations. Schulz, a creator and ruler of the compensating Myth, Kafka – a Sisyphean seeker of the Absolute. Schulz – a prodigal creator of everyday Olympuses, Kafka – a notary of the all-encompassing Abyss”⁵⁸. Ewa Kuryluk echoes Ficowski’s sentiments: “Kafka describes humiliation in dry German with a consciously bureaucratic and

⁵⁴ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 85.

⁵⁵ R. Fieguth, op. cit., p. 303.

⁵⁶ R. Kostrzewa, “*Pater familias*” – rozważania o wizerunkach ojca w twórczości Brunona Schulza, “*Pamiętnik Literacki*”, issue 86, 1995, vol. 4, p. 47.

⁵⁷ W. Owczarski, op. cit., p. 255. It should be emphasized, at least marginally, that we are discussing the literary image of the fathers of both writers, which may have nothing to do with the real Hermann Kafka and Jakub Schulz.

⁵⁸ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 74.

rabbinic tinge. Schulz traces socio-biological degradation with the help of poetic Polish language – grotesque, sensual, ironic and inspired by Hasidic humour”⁵⁹. And lastly, there is commentary by Daniel Kalinowski: “Schulz is a plenitude of imagination, an explosion and profusion of artistic means; Kafka – an abundance of logic, an implosion and litotes of expressive style. Schulz is the Jewry of small towns, where Semites usually feel ‘familiarly’, while Kafka is the Jewry of large cities, where Israelites usually feel ‘alien’. Schulz is the acceptance and positive myth-creation of the father, Kafka – the negation and fear of the father who is dangerous...”⁶⁰. Jerzy Ficowski keeps the discussion on similarities brief: “Only a very superficial knowledge of Schulz’s work may allow one to claim a close affinity with Kafka. In fact, these are radically different worlds, extremely different creative motives, distant philosophies”⁶¹.

Even if we fully agree that the similarities between the works of Schulz and Kafka do not go beyond decorations and motifs, and ultimately – as Wojciech Owczarski claimed – that their works differ in terms of “language, narrative, theme, [and] they evoke different emotional reactions in readers and reveal different creative intentions of the authors”⁶², we cannot deny that some incredible thread connected their lives. Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak, drew attention to this fact, and I will add some of my own observations to her thoughts⁶³. Two assimilated Jews from the province of the Austrian Empire, one from the West and one from the East, born less than ten years apart, speaking the language of the land that welcomed them, living at the intersection of cultures, experiencing war and anti-Semitism, fascinated by Zionism. Sons of a haberdashery merchant from Prague and a cloth merchant from Drohobych, respectively, both of them, apart from a short period of studies, spent their entire lives in their family homes, their fathers had a great influence on them, which in one case resulted in feelings ranging from admiration to hatred, and, in the other case, was limited to a fond memory. For both of them writing had an almost religious meaning, but the overwhelming desire to create – which was their purpose in life – was thwarted by the need to perform disliked paid work. Both of them longed for a deep understanding with another person, they established it with strong women

59 E. Kuryluk, *Gąsienicowy powóz, czyli podróż Brunona Schulza w przyszłość przeszłości*, in: *Bruno Schulz. In memoriam 1892–1942*, ed. M. Kitowska-Łysiak, Lublin 1994, p. 229.

60 D. Kalinowski, *Bruno Schulz i Franz Kafka. Drogi i bezdroża żydostwa*, “Teki. Kwartalnik literacki” 2004, no. 1, p. 112.

61 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 74.

62 W. Owczarski, op. cit., p. 248.

63 M. Kitowska, *Franz Kafka – Bruno Schulz: symptomy obsesji, “Twórczość”* 1985, no. 3, p. 130–133. I am aware that in the case of such comparisons it is impossible to avoid certain simplifications, which are, perhaps, an inherent weakness of biographical comparative literature. One must also agree that it is easy to create a litany of differences between these writers (beautiful – ugly, tall – short, eldest sibling – youngest sibling, etc.).

who – rather than objects of erotic delights – were their confidants, partners in intellectual disputes and recipients of letters, which were a form of literary self-creation. And yet, both writers remained childless bachelors throughout their lives, breaking off their engagements in the face of the impending necessity of getting married; in both of them we can also diagnose a peculiar and somewhat abnormal attitude towards the erotic. Both were overly critical of their work, experienced creative torments and sought solitude and isolation, escaped from reality to devote themselves to writing, both blamed themselves for the powerlessness that prevented them from expressing the world of their own imagination; both living on the verge of solitude and community, they did not fully belong either anywhere or to anyone. In their cultural circles, both of them could almost serve as the archetype of a Jewish writer, and yet they themselves doubted their own Jewish identity. Hypochondriacs of poor health, weak, neurotic, timid, insecure men, yet domineering and seductive, drawing their power from the idea of their own weakness. They did not fully experience literary fame and recognition during their lives, and both were fully rediscovered after their deaths. Transformed into characters from their own works, fused with their work entirely. Mythologized.

Was Schulz unaware of these analogies? He must have known about them. Or maybe he even created some of them himself. Wojciech Owczarski rightly believes that “Schulz was clearly fascinated by Kafka”, that he had “some personal interest in him”, that he found in his works and fate “something deeply moving, touching the most intimate experiences”. Kafka was his double and antagonist. “He was a distorted reflection, similar and strange at the same time, evoking affection and terror”⁶⁴. Schulz cannot free himself from him. And paradoxically, it was a mutual relationship. Kafka was fascinated by Yiddish culture. As Daniel Kalinowski wrote, “he turned to Eastern Jewry, treating it as a cure for a sense of security, hierarchy and order”. This belief was supported by a quote from Kafka: “If I had been told yesterday evening [...] that I was allowed to be whoever I wanted, then I would have liked to be a little Jewish boy from the East, in the corner of the room, with no trace of any worries. His father is talking to men in the middle, his mother, heavily shrouded, is rummaging through travelling rags, his sister is chattering with girls and scratching her beautiful hair”⁶⁵. So both of them are intertwined in some kind of an unbreakable embrace, although it cannot be denied that Schulz is dependent on Kafka, and not the other way around.

Here, we come to the conclusion that the similarity between Schulz and Kafka is not based on the fact that their works contain analogous motifs or ideas – this can always be put down to coincidence, intertextual games, or the

⁶⁴ W. Owczarski, op. cit., p. 249, 252.

⁶⁵ As cited in: D. Kalinowski, op. cit., p. 112 (cited from *Listy do Mileny*, translated by F. Konopka, Kraków [n.d.], p. 229).

influence of the age they live in and of which they were both true children. The similarity lies in something much deeper, but also obvious – in the fact that there would have been no Schulz if there had been no Kafka. If not for Kafka, Schulz would not have become a writer. Schulz was created by Kafka and shaped by his potential as a writer. Schulz must have seen Kafka as an intellectual partner, a kindred spirit he was always looking for in his interlocutors, he noticed a similar sensitivity, the same attitude to art and creation. Although he was most likely writing in his early twenties, it was only thanks to Kafka that he dared to become a writer, not a graphic artist and a painter who occasionally reaches for a pen to fully express the world of his artistic visions⁶⁶. If Jerzy Ficowski is right, then Schulz matured as a writer during conversations and exchange of correspondence with Władysław Riff – that is, at a time when on numerous occasions they must have discussed a German-speaking Jewish writer they had just discovered. And soon Schulz was ready to face him, to respond to his calling. And it is not just that Kafka told Schulz how and what to write about. Schulz had his own style, his own subjects, he remained a distinct and inimitable writer, even when (or especially when) he conducted his subtle, even hidden polemic with Kafka. Because how could he not argue with the one he considered his spiritual father? He wanted to share him with the world and at the same time distance himself from him, so as not to get dominated. Therefore, instead of fearing that Schulz may be wrongly mistaken for Kafka's epigone, we should emphasize that, having emerged from a common socio-cultural core or even from its single, Kafkaesque branch, Schulz created his own lush, unique offshoot. There is nothing wrong with finding elements of one writer's world in the work of another's. This only confirms that this author did not write in separation from his contemporary age and literary tradition. Our concern should be focused on the fact that some writers are more willingly viewed outside of the context of their contemporary age and its trends, both main and peripheral; instead, they are studied in the narrow context of their biographies, not against the background of other outstanding creators, but against the background of their fathers, sisters and brothers⁶⁷.

66 Cf. a text titled *Undula*, published in 1922 in "Świt" and reprinted in "Schulz/Forum", which clearly proves, contrary to previous statements of scholars that Schulz, even though not yet having the courage to publish under his own name (he signed as Marcei Weron), was shaping his literary language and the world of imagination already in the early 1920s.

67 More willingly, but that does not mean strictly. A feature of fundamental Schulzological works is actually moving away from the biographical paradigm.

4

But that is not the conclusion yet. In *Księga listów* [The Book of Letters], Jerzy Ficowski writes that: Kafka “was recognized after World War II, so twenty years after his death, as one of the greatest writers of modern times (this analogy in the twenty-years-late recognition is the only significant similarity between the works of both writers)”⁶⁸. The only one? How can we be so sure? Where does this categorical attitude come from, laced with irritation, which leaves no room for discussion? No, we cannot be sure, and that is it. Why doesn't Ficowski want us to rummage through Schulz's literary family tree? What is he afraid of? Is it just that Schulz might have had some literary forebears, and he would not have been an epiphany of natural genius? Well, if Schulz is really the Polish Kafka, then Jerzy Ficowski is the Polish Max Brod. But is that bad? Max Brod played a fundamental role in the history of literature. It was to him that Kafka entrusted the execution of his will. We all know that the will stipulated that all unfinished works, diaries, letters should be destroyed. In a sense, Brod betrayed his friend and a year after his death he published his first novel found in some old papers. He finished it, edited it, and found a publisher. In the following years he published two more novels. Since they did not meet with the appropriate response, Brod undertook the titanic effort of adding endless comments to Kafka's apparently incomprehensible prose. Not only did he share more stories, letters and diaries, but he also explained how they should be understood. He achieved success quite late, but it was an incredible success. Kafka was hailed as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. Brod became the godfather of modern Kafkology, the Saint Paul of the cult of Kafka. Also, an increasing problem for Kafka himself. His interpretations did not match the new times, and often turned out to be erroneous; additionally, he was more and more often accused of distorting the edited works with his arbitrary decisions, and that he censored Kafka, that he blocked reliable research on his life and work, that he hindered the creation of a new, critical edition of Kafka's writings, that he prevented access to many manuscripts and that he fought against any interpretation inconsistent with his own findings. Because of him the discussion about Kafka's work was poisoned for decades by biographism which excluded a broader perspective. That is why Milan Kundera could write: “Max Brod created the image of Kafka and the image of his work; at the same time, he created Kafkology. Kafkologists eagerly and noisily challenge their father's authority, but they never leave the place he

⁶⁸ See footnote 5 to a letter to Rudolf Ottenbreit, in: B. Schulz, *Księga Listów*, p. 349.

has assigned to them. Kafkology, despite the astronomical number of texts it relies on, still develops, in many variants, the same discourse, the same speculation which, becoming more and more independent from Kafka's work, feeds only on itself. In countless prefaces, afterwords, notes, biographies and monographs it creates and maintains the image of Kafka in such a way that the author known to the public under the name of Kafka is no longer Kafka, but Kafka kafkologised⁶⁹. Now let us replace Max Brod with Jerzy Ficowski and Kafkology with Schulzology, and this paragraph will still make sense. Jerzy Ficowski, in a surprising way, inherits all his merits and faults from Brod. Schulz's biography written by Ficowski becomes his hagiography, criticism is replaced by exegesis, and Schulz himself is thrown out of the aesthetics and current of European modernism in which he worked, and immersed in the amber of the biographical context. Despite Ficowski's undeniable merits, the absence of which would have resulted in the fate of the artist remaining forever in the darkness of oblivion, and his work being poorer by hundreds of pages of letters and drawings, he also did Schulz a disservice by narrowing the horizon of interpretation of his work and keeping silent about some of the facts regarding his biography, known only to him.

Since I have already quoted Kundera, I will repeat after him, adding Ficowski to Brod, that both of them betrayed their friends. They brought to light every smallest piece about them, revealed their most deeply hidden secrets, exposed to the crowd the shameful weaknesses of these modest, secretive, shy people. And we follow the trail of traitors and reveal even what they hesitated to reveal. There is no point in explaining that Schulz wanted to save his life, his work, his memory, and we only execute this unwritten last will, that by saving the memory of Schulz, we also save the entire world that he represented and described, and which was irreversibly destroyed. I am not sure whether Schulz wanted such salvation. They both only wanted to save their work (paradoxically, Kafka must have wanted that too. Let us not be fooled by the popular opinion that he ordered everything to be destroyed because he "nullified" his work – he nullified the unfinished work and his private notes, but wanted to save the main literary pieces – why would he work, then, on his deathbed on a new collection of stories?).

But wouldn't Jerzy Ficowski be proud of this comparison? Wasn't he referred to as the Polish Brod in the words expressing the highest respect? After all, John Updike himself wrote that as the executor of Schulz's last will Ficowski was no less devoted to the late writer than Max Brod was to Kafka. Stanisław Barańczak



69 M. Kundera, *Zdradzone testamenty*, translated by M. Bieńczyk, Warszawa 1996, p. 41. Philip Roth wrote in a similar vein: "When I studied Kafka, the fate of his books in the hands of specialists on Kafka seemed to me more grotesque than the fate of Józef K." (quoted in: B. Balint, op. cit., p. 313–314).

explained that “Ficowski opposed not the writer’s last will, but the will of the Holocaust”; Victoria Nelson emphasized that Ficowski carried out his mission to save Schulz’s work and his memory, as tirelessly as Brod, and that if it were not for Ficowski, as Jarosław Anders argued, there would be no Schulz, just as without Brod there would be no Kafka⁷⁰. Yes, Ficowski must have been aware of these comparisons, he could have deliberately portrayed himself as the Polish Max Brod, not even realising that both of them played at least more than one role in the posthumous biography of the writers they loved. Still, it was precisely this awareness and unawareness that made Ficowski uncritically assess his own role in the history of Polish literature and he did not want at all costs to allow anyone to take Schulz’s work out of his hands, or to let his interpretation follow other paths than those he himself marked on the map of possible readings of Schulz’s work. On this map there were no roads leading to the main currents of that time and the most important artistic trends, there were only paths lined with lush burdock leading to the yard of a house in Drohobych.

And just like Schulz became fascinated not with Kafka himself, but with the image of Kafka created by Max Brod, the same way, instead of being fascinated with Schulz himself, we often are captivated with his image created by Jerzy Ficowski. In both cases, it is a suggestive and exciting image, but at the same time it is subjective and as such not free from misinterpretations that, under the weight of authority, become “revealed truths”⁷¹.

What is our way out of this predicament, then? Perhaps only to move away from biography, hagiography, and exegesis – and to concentrate on textual criticism and study the reception and connections of Schulz’s work with the literary and philosophical tradition. In other words, we might want to put Schulz’s work in the context of great literature – the works of Franz Kafka included.



70 J. Updike, *The Visionary of Drohobych*, “The New York Times Book Review”, 30 October 1988, p. 3; S. Barańczak, *Twarz Brunona Schulza*, in: *Bruno Schulz in memoriam*, ed. M. Kitowska-Łysiak, Lublin 1994, p. 25–26; V. Nelson, *Leaving by the Closet Door*, “Salmagundi” 2006, No. 150–151 (Spring–Summer), p. 294; J. Anders, *The Prisoner of Myth*, “The New Republic”, 25 November 2002, p. 33. I would like to thank Zofia Ziemann, a scholar in the English-language reception of Schulz’s works, for sharing these texts.

71 This subjectivity also became the source, inconsistent with reality, of stereotypes concerning both authors, undoubtedly fuelled by themselves in the act of self-creation. Łukasz Musiał condemns, for example, “the stereotype of Franz Kafka as a failure in life; a man in every respect weak, helpless, living mostly on the sidelines of human affairs, devoid of any talents other than writing and being in a state of long-term depression” (Ł. Musiał, op. cit., p. XXV). In my opinion, this stereotype is equally false in relation to Schulz (I tried to convince of this view in the article “*Jednakowoż bez pięniędzy*”. *Sytuacja materialna Brunona Schulza*, “Schulz/Forum” 12, 2018, p. 127–135).

Tymoteusz Skiba: Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz. Parallel Biographies

Witold Gombrowicz

Prose writer, playwright, essayist. Friend of Bruno Schulz.

Manager of immaturity, master of ridiculous, caricatured mental machinery, demonologist of culture, fierce tracker of cultural lies, positivist and worshipper of fact, master of relativism and believer in concreteness, noble Toreador, future dragon slayer and material for a great humanist¹.

In the 1930s, he was a regular visitor to literary cafés in Warsaw, such as Ziemiańska and Zodiak, which he might have taken Schulz to. During their discussions, he acted as “Socrates, who dialectically ‘tripped up’ everyone and everything”², making ironic comments making poses, mocking, provoking, exposing the weaknesses of his interlocutors, and shattering trivialities and conventions – both in life and in literature. With the Skamandrites, he assumed the pose of a simpleton, and with Witkacy he pretended to be a great aristocrat. He turned his life into theatre. He was a champion at making faces. He claimed that his ambition was to write a play purely for facial expressions, without any words, and he was eager to show what such a play could look like³. Many writers avoided his table at the cafés – for instance, Adam Ważyk, who recalls that he only talked to him once about something important. When Gombrowicz asked him about the best contemporary writers, Ważyk mentioned Iwaszkiewicz and Nałkowska, to which Gombrowicz allegedly replied: “What? This is paper, artificial literature. The only outstanding contemporary writer is Bruno Schulz. He creates his own, unique world. This is new, unlike anything else”⁴.

1 Schulz used such terms to refer to Gombrowicz in his texts.

2 T. Breza, “Jak pojawili się Witold i Bruno”, in: idem, *Nelly o kolegach i o sobie*, Warszawa 1983, p. 369.

3 J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, Gdańsk 1992, p. 211.

4 Ibidem, p. 226.



"Polish writers whose first novels were published by 'Rój'" – Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz.
Photos from the catalogue, 1938

Friendship with Schulz

Schulz and Gombrowicz were definitely friends, even though they were apparently not interested in the private lives of each other. They were mainly interested in topics related to art and literary life. Schulz disregarded personal topics, but “brought from Drohobych an insatiable desire for spiritual and intellectual coexistence”⁵. Gombrowicz was interested primarily in intellectual friendship: “Schulz was an extremely close person to me, we talked for hours about the issues of art that fascinated us, and yet I was a hundred times closer to my first cousin from the countryside, I was not interested in Schulz’s private existence; to me, he was consciousness and sensitivity *in abstracto*”⁶. There is certainly a lot of exaggeration in Gombrowicz’s words. In his letters to family, in memoirs, as well as in scraps of the writers’ private correspondence that have survived to this day, you can find traces of mutual care and affection: “Dear Bruno, it was a great weight off my mind to hear your well-being improved. May this positive spell last”⁷.

1933: *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* and *Sklepy cynamonowe*

They both made their debuts in 1933, at the same “Rój” Publishing Society, with collections of short stories, the publication of which had to be half paid for by their families. *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* [Memoir from Adolescence] was financed by Witold Gombrowicz’s father, while *Sklepy cynamonowe* [The Cinnamon Shops] by Schulz’s brother. Both books, different and unique, also had a common denominator – they uncompromisingly dealt with both conventional reality and realist literature, using fantastic motifs, mystification, irony, and elements of the grotesque. Despite the similarities, the status of two debutants in the literary environment was different. Schulz entered literary salons and was appreciated, “the elite knew and respected him”⁸; many positive, detailed reviews of his work were published, and he himself could publish further stories – while Gombrowicz felt “disrespected and ridiculed”⁹. This state of affairs has been analysed by Klementyna Suchanow. Here is one observation she made: “Schulz’s debut, reviewed by the same critic, Leon Piwiński, takes two full columns in

⁵ W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie. Wędrówki po Argentynie*, Warszawa 1990, p. 91.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 91.

⁷ B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, list od Witolda Gombrowicza, no. III 10, p. 278.

⁸ W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

⁹ K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz. Ja, Geniusz*, vol. 1, Wołowiec 2017, p. 241.

‘Wiadomości Literackie’, and is accompanied by a strikingly large self-portrait of the writer, while the review of *Memoirs* is an incomplete column sandwiched between five others, the space of which is also taken up by the advertising below”¹⁰.

1934: First meetings at Służewska and Chocimska

It is not known for certain how they met. Gombrowicz recalled that it was probably Schulz who called him: “He’s read my *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* and would like to talk to me”¹¹. *Pamiętnik* was published at the turn of April and May 1933, but the writers met after the publication of *Sklepy cynamonowe*, probably in the first half of 1934, in Gombrowicz’s apartment at ul. Służewska 3¹². This is how their meetings, discussions and conversations began, which they “usually enjoyed walking”¹³. Gombrowicz recalled years later: “It’s funny to think that when poor Bruno Schulz visited me in ul. Służewska, the two of us were already authors of books that were to become famous in Europe”¹⁴. During the first meeting, Schulz allegedly expressed his admiration for *Pamiętnik*: “What a volume! I am dazzled by your short stories... I couldn’t produce anything like this myself”¹⁵ – this assessment was also repeated later, among others in a letter to Zenon Waśniewski of January 28, 1935 (“great – *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania!*”)¹⁶ and to Romana Halpern on November 29, 1936: “Gombrowicz is a very interesting writer, one of the most interesting. Do you know his *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*? Please read it – it’s a great book”¹⁷.

Initially, Gombrowicz did not trust all the reassuring comments from Schulz, who, in his opinion, also lavished praise on others, but he soon found out that these words spoken during the first meeting were not only sincere, but also the beginning of their friendship. “No one has ever shown me such generous friendship



¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 240–241.

¹¹ W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

¹² The Gombrowicz family had lived in ul. Służewska since 1911. It was a spacious apartment with eight rooms on the second floor of the tenement house. The building does not exist today, and ul. Służewska was rebuilt in a slightly different location. In mid-1934, the family moved to ul. Chocimska 35. The mother and sister took up a four-room apartment on the first floor, Gombrowicz moved to a smaller, two-room apartment without a bathroom, only with a tap and a sink – guaranteeing independence, but at the same time located next to his mother’s place, where he could get dinner and use the bathroom. The apartment was located at number 15. See K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, chapter: “Służewska 3” and “Chocimska 35”; J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 182–188.

¹³ W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1969*, Kraków 2013, p. 655.

¹⁴ Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, oprac. J. Margański, Kraków 2019, p. 311.

¹⁵ Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

¹⁶ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 39, p. 83.

¹⁷ See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

and supported me so zealously”¹⁸ – he recalled in 1961. Gombrowicz repeatedly emphasized that such selfless support in the literary community was something unheard of – and that he himself was unable to repay Schulz. That is not entirely true. According to Aleksander Fiut, “from the very first moment they noticed each other and appreciated each other’s talents and greatness”¹⁹. Gombrowicz expressed this many times²⁰. Years later, he called him “the most excellent artist of all those had met in Warsaw”, “the most European artist, with the right to sit among the highest intellectual and artistic aristocracy of the continent”, and his prose seemed to him “creative and immaculate”²¹; he added, though, after a while that the high form he had developed, together with great respect for art and certain perversions limited him like an ivory tower²².

Even before moving to the apartment in ul. Chocimska, probably in the summer of 1934, Gombrowicz organized a party, to which he invited many artists and writers, aristocrats and bohemians. He welcomed guests and proudly showed them around the tenement house in ul. Służewska²³: “He was proud of his apartment. ‘My Biedermeiers, my Simlers’ – he showed them around like a tour guide”²⁴. Schulz was also among the guests. According to Tadeusz Breza, he felt a bit uncomfortable in the huge rooms of this apartment. He was tired but at the same time stunned by the noisy atmosphere of the party. Finally, he lay down on the couch and kept saying “What an orgy!”²⁵ – though in reality there was no orgy.

1934–1935: Bruno, Witkacy and Gomber

Together with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Schulz and Gombrowicz were the most original literary personas of the interwar period in Poland. Their works were revolutionary, and at the same time difficult, incomprehensible and “standing in opposition to Polish literary life”²⁶. They did not form any literary group,

18 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

19 A. Fiut, “Pojedynek o doktorową z Wilczej”, in: *Czytanie Schulza. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej Bruno Schulz – w stulecie urodzin i w pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci*. Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, 8–10 czerwca 1992, pod red. J. Jarzębskiego, Kraków 1994, p. 152.

20 See among others, Gombrowicz’s article in “Kurier Poranny” of November 5, 1935, reprinted in: Witold Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych. Trudna literatura i pro domo mea”, in: idem, *Varia 1. Czytelnicy i krytycy. Proza, reportaże, krytyka literacka, eseje, przedmowy, wstęp* W. Bolecki, Kraków 2020.

21 Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

22 Ibidem, p. 94.

23 Tadeusz Breza, in his memoir from 1969, writes about ul. Natolińska because the former ul. Służewska, together with the Art Nouveau tenement house number three where Gombrowicz lived, no longer exists. The completely destroyed street was rebuilt in a slightly different place.

24 T. Breza, “Jak pojawili się Witold i Bruno”, p. 369.

25 Ibidem.

26 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

or have a common artistic program – and yet they all enjoyed the attention of the public in the interwar period and of literary historians in later years. “We were, after all, a trinity” – Gombrowicz summed up, calling Witkacy a desperate madman, Schulz a drowned madman, and himself a rebellious madman. This catchy, seemingly gimmicky classification was an attempt to determine their unconventional (“mad”) attitude to form: Witkacy’s tragedy, Schulz’s abandon and Gombrowicz’s rebellion.

Schulz organised their first meeting in 1934²⁷, leading Gombrowicz to Witkacy’s apartment in ul. Bracka²⁸. The door was opened by a figure with the stature of a dwarf, who began to grow in size before their eyes. It was actually the host who crouched down and slowly rose up. Gombrowicz was quite critical of both such pranks and the character of Witkiewicz as a whole. He saw him as a man of extraordinary intelligence, but also a boring and tiring egocentric, in whom his own flaws were reflected “as in a crooked mirror, monstrous and bloated to apocalyptic proportions”²⁹. Witkiewicz also treated Gombrowicz (whom he called Des Gombres) rather warily. Nevertheless, they kept in touch. In 1935, Witkiewicz even showed him the manuscripts of his plays, and Gombrowicz publicly considered them the most interesting texts he had read around that time – next to Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Nałkowska’s *Granica*³⁰.

Schulz met Gombrowicz and Witkiewicz several times during the Christmas break at the turn of 1934 and 1935. He was then in the capital with Józefina Szelińska, who recalled that they spent time “in the company of his relatives and friends who were delighted with Bruno: Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz and Breza”³¹. Schulz spent New Year’s Eve in the Witkiewicz’s family apartment at ul. Bracka 23. That evening, Witkacy painted portraits of his guests, Tadeusz and Zofia Breza, and he wrote an obscene poem dedicated to Schulz³². Late in the evening, Tadeusz Breza, and, most likely, Schulz and Witkacy, too, went to a party organized by Gombrowicz: “I organized an artsy binge in my mother’s apartment

27 Klementyna Suchanow claims that it was December 1934, see *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 267.

28 It was the apartment of Witkacy’s wife, Jadwiga Witkiewiczowa, and also his Warsaw address, where he most often spent spring and autumn (he stayed in Zakopane in summer and winter). His studio and the famous “museum of horrors” were in ul. Bracka. Apparently, a company of portrait makers also operated there: “St. I. Witkiewicz Ltd announce their arrival in Warsaw in ul. Bracka 23 apartment 42, telephone 227-18, call 10-1”, see J. Witkiewiczowa, “Wspomnienia o Stanisławie Ignacym Witkiewiczu”, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy do żony (1936–1939)*, appendix J. Witkiewiczowa, przygotowała do druku A. Micińska, oprac. i przypisami opatrzył J. Degler, Warszawa 2012, p. 572–573.

29 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 93.

30 *Jaką najciekawszą książkę przeczytałem w r. 1935. Ankieta tygodnika “Prosto z mostu”*, “Prosto z Mostu. Tygodnik literacko-artystyczny”, 2 lutego 1935, no. 5 (59), p. 5.

31 Letter from Józefina Szelińska to Jerzy Ficowski. Quoted after: J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia, Sejny 2002*, p. 325.

32 See S. Okowicz, *Śliwka i tacet. O spotkaniach Schulza i Witkacego*, „Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016.

in ul. Chocimska [...]. The party lasted until six in the morning and was a visible sign of how firmly I had established myself in the Warsaw literary world. I don't remember anymore who was there, but in any case Breza, Mauersbergers and Tonio Sobański must have been there, as well as Rudnicki and probably Choromański. There was a brotherhood of drunks led by Świątek Karpiński and 'Minie', i.e. Janusz Minkiewicz. There were various actresses, as well as Zdzisław Czermański, Kanarek (today a famous painter in the United States)... and maybe Witkacy and probably Bruno Schulz..."³³. After returning to Drohobych, on January 28, 1935, Schulz wrote to Zenon Waśniewski: "In Warsaw I made a lot of interesting acquaintances: Witkacy, T. Breza, Wittlin, Czechowicz, Gombrowicz (excellent *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania!*)"³⁴.

1935: Illustrations and compliments

Gombrowicz recalled that Schulz often visited him in the apartment in ul. Służewska, and later also in ul. Chocimska: "He was an inconspicuous man and I'm afraid no one would look at me and him and realise how powerful giants of world literature were in front of them"³⁵. It was probably during these meetings that the idea for Schulz to illustrate Gombrowicz's works arose. However, between February and March 1935, Schulz wrote to Waław Czarski – the editor-in-chief of "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" – that Gombrowicz had not sent him the promised text to be illustrated. It was probably supposed to be the short story *Tośka. Fragmenty*, which was published on July 14, 1935 in "Tygodnik"³⁶, or a fragment of *Ferdydurke*, which was published in the July issue of "Skamander"³⁷. The idea of Gombrowicz's works illustrated by Schulz materialised two years later, with the book edition of *Ferdydurke* of 1937.

Gombrowicz valued *The Street of Crocodiles* very highly, which he admitted publicly – for instance, in "Kurier Poranny", where on November 5, 1935, the article "O myślach chudych" [Of Lean Thoughts] was published, which was a response to Ignacy Fik's accusations of excessive allegiance to Michał Choromański and the group of penmen surrounding him³⁸. On this occasion, Gombrowicz

33 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 85.

34 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Zenona Waśniewskiego, no. 1 39, p. 83.

35 W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 279.

36 The story is printed without illustrations, see W. Gombrowicz, *Tośka. (Fragmenty)*, "Tygodnik Ilustrowany", 14 lipca 1935, no. 28, p. 556–557.

37 The fragment is illustrated with one drawing by Feliks Topolski; it was certainly the editor's choice, not Gombrowicz's, see W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, "Skamander. Miesięcznik literacki", lipiec 1935, p. 264–284.

38 Gombrowicz argued with the article by Ignacy Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, "Tygodnik Artystów", 23 lutego 1935, no. 15, p. 1–2.

MIESIĘCZNIK LITERACKI

STUDIO

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

LIST OTWARTY DO BRUNONA SCHULZA

Mój dobry Bruno,

Bogusław chce abyśmy pisywali mu w *Studio* — czy nie lepiej jednak sobie pisać w *Studio*? — a najlepiej chyba do siebie pisywać? — tak, do siebie wzajem pisać najprzyjemniej, o ileż rozkoszniej wystrzelić, celując w konkretną osobę, niż strzelać w przestrzeń okólnikiem, adresowanym do wszystkich, zatem do nikogo. Długi czas myślałem, jaką by tu myślą wystrzelić w Ciebie, dobry Bruno, lecz na żadną nie mogłem wpaść, aż dopiero wczoraj wpadłem na myśl żony pewnego doktora, spotkanej przypadkowo w osiemnastce. — *Bruno Schulz* — powiedziała — *to albo chory zboczeniec, albo pozer; lecz najpewniej pozer. On tylko udaje tak.* — Powiedziała — i wysiadła — bo akurat tramwaj przystanął przy Wilczej.

Strzelam więc w Ciebie myślą tej kobiety. Notyfikuję publicznie, oficjalnie i formalnie Twej osobie, iż żona lekarza ma Cię za wariata, lub pozera. I wyzywam, abyś zajął stanowisko wobec żony. Oto gdzieś na Wilczej mieszka połowica specjalisty o której wiesz już, co myśli o Tobie. Tam, na Wilczej, mieszka, tam żywi ten swój sąd ujemny, tam rozpowiada go przygodnie znajomym, którzy wierzą jej na słowo. Tam, na Wilczej, na Wilczej, Bruno, pod sto drugim urasta i toczy się ta przykra opinia, myśl nieprzychylna bardzo stanowczej w swych sądach członkini szerokich

complimented his friend: “Here is a writer of the highest class in Poland, without exaggeration, truly the highest... an artist to the core, whose *The Street of Crocodiles* provided me with the true delight of the elite, both ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’. An worker, absorbed by the completely tiring and very difficult task of throwing out his gloomy and wonderful vision, of a man who writes not what he wants, but what he must, a writer who is a writer precisely because he is himself, refined, subtle, revealing, operating on the border of what is expressible, all striving towards his difficult calling”³⁹.

February–October 1936: “Party with Witold”, or three letters in “Studio”

On February 4, 1936, in the evening, Schulz and Gombrowicz met in Warsaw at Zofia Nałkowska’s. The meeting was also attended by the diplomat Władysław Baranowski, the painter Henryk Berlewi and the writer Włodzimierz Pietrzak⁴⁰. They all discussed literary style inspired by Gombrowicz’s “astonishing, witty, polemical”⁴¹ essay “O stylu Zofii Nałkowskiej”. A month later, Schulz wrote to Andrzej Pleśniewicz: “If you see Witold, please send him my warm greetings. Tell him not to be angry that I have not written to him yet”⁴². Nałkowska notes that Schulz and Gombrowicz also visited her on July 15, 1936. Certainly, both of them visited her place in ul. Marszałkowska 4 quite often. Nałkowska included both Gombrowicz, as well as Schulz in her “regular company” composed of writers and poets: Adolf Rudnicki, Alfred Łaszowski, Tadeusz Breza, Włodzimierz Pietrzak, Bolesław Miciński, Elżbieta Szemplińska⁴³. Years later, Gombrowicz even wondered whether it was at Zofia Nałkowska’s place that he met Bruno Schulz⁴⁴.

In Nałkowska’s society, Schulz and Gombrowicz also met with Bogusław Kuczyński, her secretary and then partner. Kuczyński, who had been jealous of Schulz (in July 1935, he destroyed a copy of *The Street of Crocodiles* with

39 W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 192.

40 Writer, poet, literary critic. He wrote an article about the correspondence between Schulz and Gombrowicz, which was published in “Studio” (see *Święte szukanie*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki” 1936, no. 9) and a negative review of *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* (see *Bluszcz na ruinach*, “Prostoż Mostu” 1938, no. 27). He died fighting in the Warsaw Uprising. In 1948, his essay *Mit bohaterą* [The Myth of the Hero] was published posthumously, in which he wrote about *Ferdynand* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* that they were works that lead nowhere, were falsified, and pursued strangeness. They were by no means immoral, but “just very boring. Boredom begins with the question: ‘so what?’ and ends with a yawn” (“Nowiny Literackie” 1948, no. 12).

41 Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV: 1930–1939. Część 2 (1935–1939)*, oprac., wstęp i komentarz H. Kirchner, Warszawa 1988, p. 97.

42 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 39, p. 83.

43 Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Część 2 (1935–1939)*, p. 138.

44 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

a dedication for Nałkowska)⁴⁵ – invited him and Gombrowicz to publish texts in the monthly literary journal “Studio”, of which he was the editor. The most spectacular effect of this cooperation was the exchange of letters between the writers, which were published in October 1936⁴⁶. It is generally believed that Bogusław Kuczyński was the originator and initiator of such open correspondence in the magazine, but it seems more likely that it was Gombrowicz’s idea⁴⁷: “Bogusław wants us to write for him in *Studio* – isn’t it better to write for ourselves in *Studio*? – and it’s probably best to write to each other? – yes, to write to each other is more pleasant, how much more pleasant to shoot, aiming at a specific person, than to shoot into space with a general circular addressed to everyone and therefore to no one”⁴⁸.

“So I shoot at you with the thought of this woman”

Gombrowicz, an experienced debunker of forms and conventions, “shot” at Schulz with the opinion of one doctor’s wife from Wilcza⁴⁹: “Bruno Schulz, she said, is either a sick pervert or a poseur; but most likely a poseur. He’s just pretending to be so”⁵⁰. All this to check whether “Schulz, surprised on the same road by a ridiculous accident with a woman, would manage to maintain good, sovereign form or would disgrace himself”⁵¹. Why was Schulz the addressee of the letter and the target of Gombrowicz’s provocation? It is not without significance that both addressed the issue of form in their works, but social considerations may have been decisive. Gombrowicz was simply sure that Schulz would answer his letter. In 1936, Schulz was better established on the literary scene than Gombrowicz (“his literary situation was, after all, much more solid than mine. He hadn’t reached a wider audience, but the elite knew and respected him”⁵².

45 “He tore up the book, but he also burned it so that there would be nothing left, so that it could not be collected or glued together” – Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Part 2 (1935–1939)*, p. 16.

46 “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7. Reprint of all three letters: W. Gombrowicz, *Polemiki i dyskusje. Varia 2*, Kraków 2004; Schulz’s letter was reprinted in *The Book of Letters* without Gombrowicz’s letters, even though these three letters constitute an integral whole, and can be read only in their own context and should thus be interpreted in relation to each other. They have even been called an “epistolary triptych”.

47 Gombrowicz wrote about the exchange of letters as an “experiment” he provoked – see W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, listopad 1936, no. 8.

48 Idem, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 209.

49 For possible prototypes of the doctor’s wife from ul. Wilcza, see M. Wójcik, *Komentarze i przypisy*, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 7: *Szkice krytyczne*, koncepcja edytorska W. Bolecki, komentarze i przypisy M. Wójcik, oprac. językowe P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 220–221.

50 W. Gombrowicz, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, p. 209.

51 Ibidem, p. 210–211.

52 Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

Moreover, both Gombrowicz and Schulz were victims of similar public attacks, perhaps not by doctors' wives, but by literary critics who simplified everything. In a text published on November 5, 1935, Gombrowicz described the situation of Schulz, whom Ignacy Fik called a "choromaniac" [a reference to Michał Choromański]: "Naturally, Schulz cannot answer Fik, because how could he possibly reply with his rich, branched, complex and well-differentiated thought to the lean categorical nature of Mr. Fik. Nevertheless, in his writing, Mr. Fik picks on Schulz, and Bruno already thinks that he will have to move on with his life as a 'choromaniac'"⁵³.

Almost a year after the publication of the polemic with Ignacy Fik, Gombrowicz himself staged a very similar conflict, with the difference that this time he stood not at Schulz's side, but against him. He did not claim that "Schulz cannot answer", but he demanded a reply. Gombrowicz's "attack" was aimed at Schulz's elitism, artistry and high, developed style – which, according to Gombrowicz, was incomprehensible and useless outside the literary-critical circle: "Your philosophical artistic, poetic style does not predispose you to fights with the mothers of the doctors' children". Your form takes place on high. Come on! Come down to earth! [...] What would your form be worth if it was only applicable at an altitude of two thousand meters above the level of life?"⁵⁴.

"I hate the doctor's wife from Wilcza"

Schulz did not take up this game, at least not on Gombrowicz's terms. "He cowardly fled from my doctor, masking his retreat with grandiloquence" – Gombrowicz commented⁵⁵. Andrzej Pleśniewicz, in turn, believes that Schulz did not escape, but "in a playfully pathetic form expressed his credo as an artist", which was the only proper reaction to Gombrowicz's attack⁵⁶. Schulz certainly did not allow himself to be thrown out of his own form. He responded in his poetic, metaphorical style, comparing the arranged public exchange of letters to a corrida, in which Gombrowicz is a bullfighter, Schulz is a bull, readers are the audience, and the doctor's wife from Wilcza is only a cape (cloth) or an effigy stuffed with rags with blades hidden behind them and engravings. Schulz ridiculed this rhetoric, emphasizing his disregard for the rules in arenas and audience expectations. He claimed that instead of listening to screams and trivial opinions, he preferred to take the bullfighter out of the arena to engage in a quiet

⁵³ Idem, "O myślach chudych", p. 192.

⁵⁴ Idem, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, p. 211.

⁵⁵ Idem, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 275.

⁵⁶ A. Pleśniewicz, "Rozwichrzona problematyka dyskusji literackiej. Spór o doktorową", in: W. Gombrowicz, *Polemiki i dyskusje*, p. 54.

conversation with him – but this conciliatory tone was only an appearance. Immediately after this declaration, Schulz countered the attack: “No, what a paradox! You, the defender of forums and their loud acoustics!”⁵⁷. This is an accurate retort. Gombrowicz was known for hating platitudes and stereotypes; he provoked his interlocutors to prevent ordinary discussions and conventional conversations about the weather, and when someone unwisely expressed some trivial opinion, Gombrowicz immediately ridiculed them⁵⁸. Moreover, he himself defended Schulz against the primitive claims of Ignacy Fik⁵⁹, who, like the doctor’s wife from Wilcza, accused Schulz of deviations and aberrations (“Choromania! Literature that is twisted and sick”, “created by psychopaths, degenerates, and drug addicts” and other perverts and lunatics⁶⁰). Schulz expressed his surprise by asking further questions – as if in disbelief towards Gombrowicz’s affirmation for “lean thoughts”⁶¹ – his applause for popular and average opinions⁶². Schulz opposed this fascination with contempt for “philistine obtuseness” and “formulaic thinking”. He wrote directly: “I hate the doctor’s wife from Wilcza”, perhaps also because her opinion was in line with national-radical literary criticism and anti-Semitic sentiments⁶³ of the second half of the 1930s. But the doctor’s wife’s voice – concluded Schulz – arose in Gombrowicz himself, the crowd hidden in the individual that may seem like a powerful force, but it is actually a weakness of human nature. This also includes Gombrowicz’s nature, which can surrender to the rhythm of what is popular and mass, just as a trained bear surrenders to the sounds of the “gypsy pipe”⁶⁴.

The phenomenon of a stupid joke with devastating power – which can defeat an opponent regardless of arguments and reasons – is, according to Schulz, proof that there is a “cynical and amoral, irrational and mocking” underground system of values, symbolized by the doctor’s wife from Wilcza. Schulz considered Gombrowicz to be the discoverer of this unwritten and mysterious code:

57 B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 213.

58 Stefan Otwinowski, among others, was exposed to such ridicule: “Oh, I see, Mr. Stefczyk, that you have read the Sunday supplement ‘IKACA’ again – he interrupted Otwinowski with a smile when he expressed an opinion that – in Gombrowicz’s view – was stereotypical, good only for the readers of the popular mass ‘Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny’” – see J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 210.

59 W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”.

60 I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1.

61 Gombrowicz called the revelations of literary critics directed towards the so-called young literature “lean thoughts”: “In this extreme example, we see how badly lean thought works – how much it is out of place” – W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, s. 192–193.

62 Jerzy Jarzębski calls Gombrowicz’s mania “a fascination with inferiority and interpersonal clashes in that sphere” – see J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 58.

63 “Gombrowicz probably did not take into account that the tone of his voice, the tone of self-important gossip, could have reminded Schulz of the tone with which anti-Semitic slogans were shouted at that time” – see J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 59.

64 B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, p. 213.

“I consider it a great merit that you, for the first time, led our thoughts and feelings to these matters. If I’m not mistaken, you were the first to sniff out the dragon in its thousand hiding places and get within arm’s length of it”⁶⁵. Schulz therefore changes the corrida space arranged by Gombrowicz (in which the bullfighter sneakily kills the bull to the delight of the crowd) into a heroic fight between a knight and a dragon. The knight is Gombrowicz himself, “armed with powerful tools of murder”, and the dragon is an irrational system of values, which is to be killed and sacrificed on the altar of higher values, such as art and humanity. Even though Schulz expressed his concern about such alliances with the dragon, he still – perversely and somewhat ironically – considered his adversary to be a great humanist who would tame the inhuman. Gombrowicz himself would later write about this passage: “in the second part of his reply, he made a playfully pathetic appeal that put me in an extremely difficult position”⁶⁶.

“Bruno, you’re an old kid, like all of us!”

In response, Gombrowicz attacked with a whole arsenal of childish artifacts, which he contrasted with the high values supported by Schulz. These include a specific lexicon: twats, panties, shins, legs and a full catalogue of issues related to calves. Gombrowicz withdrew imperceptibly from the strategy adopted in the first letter, in which the blade of arguments was the laughter from the crowd – which Schulz pointed out to him. Talking about his aunts, he wrote: “I apologize to you, Saint Bruno, for the thoughts of these women, incurably sceptical about their own nephews”⁶⁷, and immediately afterwards he added: “I would like to confront Goethe himself with his aunt, the calf – I would like to use the calf to destroy the writerly faces of you all!”⁶⁸. In Gombrowicz’s second letter, there is no more mocking noise of the crowd and its merciless shouts. The doctor’s wife from Wilcza created by Gombrowicz does not flaunt her malicious opinions anymore but is intended to bite Schulz at his calves – to knock him off the pedestal, throw him off the ivory tower and put him on the ground among ordinary people, that is, all the hobbledehoys. First, we are girls with calves, nephews in underpants that are too short, and only then are we writers and artists – Gombrowicz seemed to be saying to Schulz, and at the same time to all writers

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 215–216.

⁶⁶ W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 275.

⁶⁷ Idem, *Do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 218.

⁶⁸ There is a certain paradox in Gombrowicz’s intention. Under the very form of open letters of the two writers, there is a mask, a clear form of two great authors arguing with each other at the heights of the literary Parnassus (despite the seeming insignificance of calves and doctors’ wives). This was noticed, among others, by Jan Emil Skiński, who was hostile to Gombrowicz and Schulz – see J. E. Skiński, *Łańcuch szczęścia*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 42, p. 794.

of that time, hidden deep in their reliance on the image of themselves as “bards”. Relationships between body and spirit, throwing off masks, enslavement to form, childishness – for Gombrowicz, the exchange of letters became another kind of practice for *Ferdydurke*, in which everything turns out to have a child within⁶⁹.

October–December 1936: “Grumbling for the record” – the reaction of the press to the letters in “Studio”

The letters of Gombrowicz and Schulz published in “Studio” were noticed by many critics and commentators of literary life⁷⁰. On October 18, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” published an article by Jan Emil Skiwski “Łańcuch szczęścia”, devoted to snobbery⁷¹, literary anaemia, self-love and the pretentiousness of the authors. In response, Schulz sent a letter to the editor of “Tygodnik”, Waclaw Czarski, titled “Zamiast odpowiedzi”⁷² [Instead of an answer]. In it, he expressed his reluctance to debate such a primitively presented argument and criticism directed at him: “I do not think I am as naive and limited as Mr. Skiwski claims. I also do not suppose I am a snob, hungry for cheap and trivial successes, and I also believe that my literary activity to date does not justify such a presentation”⁷³.

In November, Gombrowicz also spoke out and decided that he had to explain the meaning of the “experiment” he had provoked⁷⁴, and at the same time enter a polemic with Skiwski. The purpose of the open exchange of letters, according to Gombrowicz, was to check whether his “friend” Bruno Schulz had the command of language in every respect, even in tactless situations, when life throws a person out of their most comfortable form. “I decided to have fun with

69 Jerzy Jarzębski writes that in the final version of the novel we will find “sentences as if taken from open letters addressed to Bruno Schulz in ‘Studio’” – see J. Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, Warszawa 1982, p. 215.

70 See A. Pleśniewicz, *Spór o doktorową. Rozwichrzona problematyka dyskusji literackiej*, “Kurier Poranny” 1936, no. 329; J. E. Skiwski, *Łańcuch szczęścia*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 42; W. Pietrzak, *Święte szukanie*, “Studio” 1936, no. 9; W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, “Studio” 1936, no. 8.

71 Critics associated with the national movement were obsessed with “literary snobbery”, which can be seen, for example, in the articles of Stanisław Piasecki, editor-in-chief of the weekly “Prosto z Mostu”. Gombrowicz knew that it was difficult to escape from this form, which is why he often used snobbery: “It was some kind of mania for snobbery, or some game of snobbery [...]. For, after all, we were all snobs, even though, to be honest, we were not. Oh, form!” – see W. Gombrowicz, *Testament. Rozmowy z Dominique de Roux*, Kraków 2012, p. 14–15.

72 The letter was published on November 1, 1936 on the last pages of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” next to advertisements for a mild laxative, toothpaste and powder – see B. Schulz, *Zamiast odpowiedzi*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 44, p. 848.

73 See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Waclawa Czarskiego, no. I 58, p. 99–100.

74 W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*.

Bruno – I wrote an open letter to him that was deliberately tactless”⁷⁵. According to Gombrowicz, Schulz (“a noble, pure and impractical poet”) failed and, in fact, fled in a cowardly manner from confrontation with the grey, ordinary life that had materialised in front of him in the form of the doctor’s wife from Wilcza. Running away, though, he set a trap for Gombrowicz, who indeed fell into it. “My answer, which was supposed to be light, humorous, and belittling, turned out to be heavy and insufficient in the context of Schulz’s letter [...]. Does this mean that Schulz and I are snobs?”⁷⁶.

With this question, Gombrowicz referred to Skiwski’s text, and then step by step ridiculed the thesis of his article, such as the order to remain silent about himself, a ban on writing about his ordinary problems, on making public only the complete and perfect works carved in solitude, reserving certain topics exclusively for outstanding writers such as Gide and Mauriac. Gombrowicz did not shy away from malice: “It is not strange that such an opinion comes from the mouth of a man who does nothing else but – in short and necessarily superficial articles – raises issues that, to put it in his terminology, he is not mature enough to handle, and he judges people who are way above him”. To the accusation of pretending to be someone he was not, Gombrowicz replied: “An element of a perfectly conscious mystification is common to both of us, and is most clearly visible in Schulz’s works, and everything I have written so far has been a mystification and parody only”⁷⁷. Towards the end, Gombrowicz paraphrases Skiwski’s words by writing about the “error of our criticism” that develops at someone else’s expense.

On November 26, 1936, in “Kurier Poranny”, Andrzej Pleśniewicz commented on the exchange of letters in “Studio”, firmly siding with Schulz. Pleśniewicz drew attention to “the confusion of conceptual territories” in Gombrowicz’s reasoning regarding art and life. As a result, he considered it unjustified to demand that a writer should be able to behave or express himself appropriately in every life situation. It is as if – Pleśniewicz compared – as if an excellent fencer was obliged to master the cudgel⁷⁸.

Three days after this publication in “Kurier Poranny”, in a letter dated November 29, 1936, Schulz thanked Pleśniewicz for his support in the confrontation with Gombrowicz, “for such a beautiful and profound defence”. He expressed surprise that his “party with Witold” was taken so seriously because he had previously considered it “trivial and playful”, and only after some time, in the course of subsequent discussions, it began to take on new meanings “illuminating

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 274.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 275.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 279.

⁷⁸ A. Pleśniewicz, *Rozwiczrzone problemy dyskusji literackiej*, p. 54–55.

those epiphenomena that followed”⁷⁹. The same day, and in a similar tone, he wrote back to Romana Halpern, who had referred to the exchange of letters in “Studio”: “I did not write about the correspondence with Gombrowicz, because in fact it was a trivial matter – it is not known why it was discussed so much”⁸⁰. Two days later, on December 1, Schulz wrote to Pleśniewicz again, probably in response to his question about the article from “Kurier Poranny”⁸¹. Schulz admitted that his opinion about the provocation in “Studio” was similar – that “the real personal benefit of mastering the phrase ‘it cannot be’ is a test of artistry” and “the groundlessness of the demand that a writer be what Gombrowicz calls a ‘full writer’”⁸². He noted, however, that the opponent’s position was very strong, it was not easy to argue with him, and Gombrowicz could effectively attack Pleśniewicz in this field.

In December of the same year, in the 9th issue of “Studio”, Włodzimierz Pietrzak, an acquaintance of Schulz and Gombrowicz, who often visited Zofia Nałkowska’s apartment, also expressed his view. In his text, Pietrzak defended Schulz against the charge of insanity⁸³, saying that a non-mimetic type of creativity (called “sacred seeking”) is necessary for the further development of culture. “It is worth putting the name of such madness as a laurel on a burnt forehead”⁸⁴. Pietrzak pointed out that the case of the doctor’s wife from Wilcza is a symbol of the cultural situation at the time. All art and critical ways of thinking have become, in his opinion, incomprehensible to society, and intellectual achievements are no longer useful to the crowd – that is why the crowd calls them anomalies. The author of the text therefore asked what we could do to reverse this situation: “How to educate society so that searching and discovering are not synonymous with madness?”⁸⁵.

January–October 1937: The manuscript of *Ferdydurke* – “I don’t think it needs to be published”

Gombrowicz and Schulz continued the dialogue on form outside the pages of “Studio” – unofficially and on a “confidential basis”⁸⁶. They must have



⁷⁹ See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza, no. I 69, p. 121–122.

⁸⁰ See *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

⁸¹ The letter in which Pleśniewicz asks Schulz about his article has not survived.

⁸² B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz, no. I 70, p. 123.

⁸³ A year and a half later, though, Pietrzak would criticize *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* for preferring sick solitude over such values as fight and honour, see *Bluszcz na ruinach*, “Prosto z Mostu” 1938, no. 27, p. 7.

⁸⁴ W. Pietrzak, *Święte szukanie*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki” 1936, no. 9, p. 315.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ Schulz would later describe their relationship with this word, see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, p. 158.

corresponded for some time and soon met in person. In January 1937, Gombrowicz visited Schulz, who was suffering from influenza in Warsaw⁸⁷ and had not left his bed for ten days⁸⁸. During the visit, Gombrowicz showed him the unfinished manuscript of *Ferdydurke*. Schulz was the first person to read the novel in this form⁸⁹. In a letter to Tadeusz Breza, Schulz described this version as “wonderful”⁹⁰, but it was by no means an honest statement. Schulz did not really like the first fragments of the novel⁹¹. In May 1936, he wrote to Tadeusz Breza: “Gombrowicz’s fragment did not seem vivid enough to me”⁹². But Schulz did not mean the fragment printed in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, contrary to what we could read in the footnotes to this letter⁹³. On July 14, 1935, in the 28th issue of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, Gombrowicz’s short story that would become part of the already-announced novel was published with the title “Tośka. Fragmenty”⁹⁴. Why would Tadeusz Breza write to Schulz about this old publication almost a year later, and where would Schulz get an old issue of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”? Breza was certainly referring to the second issue of “Studio” published in May 1936⁹⁵, whose editor was their friend Bogusław Kuczyński, secretary and partner of Zofia Nałkowska⁹⁶. In this issue, Breza found a story by Schulz titled “O sobie” [About Myself]⁹⁷ and Gombrowicz’s short story “Skazić urok nowoczesnej pensjonarki! (Z powieści *Ferdydurke*)” [Contaminate the Charm of a Modern Schoolgirl! (From the novel *Ferdydurke*)] – about which he wrote in a letter that

87 Schulz may not have had the flu, but he had a hard time coping with the suicide attempt of Józefina Szelińska of the second half of January 1937.

88 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 20.

89 “Bruno was first. I had confidence in him” – see W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

90 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 20, p. 59.

91 These were texts that Gombrowicz delivered to Schulz personally in draft form, or fragments of *Ferdydurke* printed in literary magazines. There were as many as ten publications preceding the book edition of the novel in nine different magazines, including “Skamander”, “Wiadomości Literackie” and “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” – see “Jak powstawała *Ferdydurke*”, in: W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, oprac. W. Bolecki, Kraków 2007, p. 261.

92 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

93 See *ibidem*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, footnote no. 26, p. 347.

94 See W. Gombrowicz, *Tośka. (Fragmenty)*, p. 556–557.

95 “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, maj 1936, no. 2. On May 10, 1936, Zofia Nałkowska wrote: “The second issue of ‘Studio’ is more beautiful, it is thicker, it has a cover, it has my article, and Schulz, Gombrowicz, Choromański, as well as my reviews of books and theatres” – see Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Część 2*, p. 109–110.

96 Breza probably announced to Schulz that the next issue of “Studio” would contain an excerpt from his novel *Adam Grywałd*, to which Schulz replied: “I am looking forward to the excerpt” – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

97 The story would later be reprinted in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* with the title “Samotność” [published in English translations as “Solitude” and “Loneliness”]. Breza praised this and probably other works, and Schulz replied: “The fragments of mine that you read – they were written by hand – once, I found them now as ‘paralipomena’. Your praise is not justified” – B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

it was more vivid than “Dziewictwo” [Virginité] from *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*. Schulz admitted that Breza was right but noted that it was probably only “the effect of [his] greater courage and awareness of [his] own intentions”⁹⁸. Schulz was not particularly impressed by the unfinished *Ferdydurke*, which he often admitted in conversations with Gombrowicz. Perhaps he did not want to criticize his friend’s book, which is why, in his letter of February 2, 1937 to Tadeusz Breza – who was an ardent enthusiast of Gombrowicz’s work⁹⁹ – he only wrote briefly: “It’s almost ready and wonderful”¹⁰⁰, without going into polemical debates or details.

Gombrowicz quoted Schulz’s true opinion about the manuscript years later: “You should rather go back to your fantasy from *Pamiętnik*, that genre suits you better”¹⁰¹, and also: “I don’t think this needs to be published”¹⁰².

Schulz’s cold reaction gave Gombrowicz food for thought: “I felt a wave of cold. No one else read this piece that I put so much work into. Bruno was first. I had confidence in him”¹⁰³. He devoted the following months to revising the novel, which was published in its entirety at the end of October 1937, together with Schulz’s illustrations. Almost nothing is known about the circumstances in which the three drawings accompanying Gombrowicz’s novel were created. Two of them were placed towards the end of the chapter “Parobek, czyli nowe przychwycenie” [The Farmhand, or a New Adoption]. The third drawing, depicting “a twisted, rheumatized oak tree with boughs and branches growing in the form of human heads, gesticulating hands and arms and bucking legs”¹⁰⁴, was featured on the dust jacket designed by Schulz. Gombrowicz referred to this drawing in the dedication written on October 20 in a copy of *Ferdydurke*, which he was to send to Schulz: “Dear Bruno, I am planting a seed for the growth of these frail body parts in the fertile and wonderful soil of yours. 20.10.1937 W.G.”¹⁰⁵.

November 1937: “When he’d read *Ferdydurke*, he burst into flames”

Schulz picked up a copy of *Ferdydurke* in the first half of November – and only this version made him truly delighted¹⁰⁶. The novel made a “thrilling” and

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ See W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. 1 20, p. 59.

¹⁰¹ Quoted after: W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

¹⁰² Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ J. Ficowski, *Komentarze i glosy*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga obrazów*, zebrał, oprac., komentarzami opatrzył J. Ficowski, p. 519.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted after: J. Ficowski, *Komentarze i glosy*, p. 519; Józefina Szeleńska found a copy of *Ferdydurke* with a dedication by Gombrowicz in 1967.

¹⁰⁶ See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. 1 9.

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

FERDYDURKE



R O J

Witold Gombrowicz, **Ferdydurke**, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój", Warszawa 1937. Cover by Bruno Schulz

“stunning” impression on him¹⁰⁷. “When he read *Ferdydurke* in the book form, he burst into flames that almost burned me, somebody who was rather cold”¹⁰⁸ – Gombrowicz recollected. Schulz even telegraphed him several times in one day to express his growing admiration¹⁰⁹. According to Schulz, it was an innovative and revelatory novel, defying any literary classification. He compared the author’s spiritual endeavour to the achievements of Sigmund Freud and Marcel Proust, and called Gombrowicz a genius¹¹⁰. Schulz confessed in one of his letters that he was in a sense “charged” by Gombrowicz’s novel, which gave him no peace¹¹¹. At the same time, he admitted that he had not expected Gombrowicz to write such a masterpiece: “It is a strange feeling when you interact with someone on such a familiar basis, and suddenly a genius bursts out of them. Gombrowicz is just brilliant”¹¹². To give an outlet to his emotions, he decided to write a text about *Ferdydurke*, which he did over the next few weeks.

1936–1938: *Ferdydurke* and Romana Halpern

In the context of Schulz’s text about *Ferdydurke*, the figure of Romana Halpern is important. At the end of November 1936, Schulz recommended her to read *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*, which he considered a “sensational book”¹¹³. A few months later, Romana Halpern asked Schulz to arrange a meeting with the author of *Pamiętnik*. Schulz promised to write to him about this matter: “As for Gombrowicz, I will try to initiate the acquaintance between you, because it is worth getting to know him. Can I just write to him that you would like to meet?”¹¹⁴. However, he started writing the letter only a month later, on September 29, 1937. That day he informed Romana Halpern: “At the same time, I am writing to Gombrowicz about you. I hope that I will be able to arrange some rapprochement between you. But he is unhealthy and not in the best shape now”¹¹⁵. Schulz’s fears were confirmed, as he informed his friend: “I am unlucky with Gombrowicz. He is going through some depression now and is avoiding people. He promised me that when he feels better, he will call you”¹¹⁶.

107 Ibidem, no. I 93, p. 158.

108 W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

109 Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 127; idem, *Kronos*, Kraków 2013, p. 37 and 43.

110 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, s. 158.

111 Ibidem.

112 Ibidem.

113 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

114 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 90, p. 153–154.

115 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 91, p. 156.

116 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 92, p. 157.

Gombrowicz's bad mood was related to the upcoming publication of *Ferdydurke*, but it did not go away with it: "Broken, sad, exhausted, I spent a few months in the Tatra Mountains, then I left for Rome. Giving birth to a book is never pleasant, but this birth was the worst of all my births"¹¹⁷. Gombrowicz also recalls that he was simply afraid of attacks by the nationalist press, which could result in him being beaten by some "fascist gang"¹¹⁸. In the next letter, dated November 16, 1937, Schulz informed Romana Halpern about the "electrifying" impression that reading *Ferdydurke* made on him. Despite Schulz's praise, the author of the novel remained "depressed and concerned about the fate of his book"¹¹⁹, he also promised to send Halpern a copy of it – which means that he was in constant contact with Schulz through correspondence. In the same letter, Schulz confided that he wanted to write a text about *Ferdydurke*. Romana Halpern, also delighted with Gombrowicz's novel, suggested to Schulz that he should publicly present his newly written article – and offered to help. She was a member of artistic and literary circles and was sometimes involved in readings and cultural events. Gombrowicz, who had read the text of the speech prepared by Schulz¹²⁰, enthusiastically responded to this initiative. He was grateful to Schulz and Romana Halpern for their engagement. Two days before the planned lecture, he wrote a card from Zakopane to Bruno Schulz: "I am touched by your activity and grateful to Mrs. Halpern for this idea"¹²¹.

January 1938: A reading that "infuriated all the mandarins of the time"

On January 11, 1938, Schulz read his article during a discussion evening at the Polish Literary Trade Union in Warsaw at ul. Pierackiego 16¹²². Schulz's paper provoked a heated discussion, with Wanda Kragen, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Stefan Napierski and Rafał Blüth expressing their opinions. Schulz himself was not satisfied with his speech: "I left that evening a bit depressed by the excellent

117 W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 43.

118 Ibidem.

119 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, s. 158.

120 We know this from Gombrowicz's letter to Schulz of July 19, 1938, in which Gombrowicz mentioned that he had read Schulz's article right after the publication of *Ferdydurke* – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 281.

121 Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 9, p. 278.

122 Press reports regarding Schulz's lecture only mention the ZZLP premises. Anyway, it is known that since 1936 the Association's premises were located at ul. Pierackiego 16a – see "Studio", *grudzień 1936*, no. 9, p. 350. For several years, Tuesday literary readings were regularly organized there: "For several years now, the Warsaw branch of the Polish Literary Trade Union organises at ul. Pierackiego 16a apartment 8 regular Tuesday discussions with eminent local and visiting speakers" – see *Odczyty w Związku Literatów*, "Wiadomości Literackie", 19 marca 1939, no. 12 (804), p. 8.

Drugi Bonus,

W: msi o zaproszeniu si: Tocy, scenarzysta opadł mi piteiny
Karaici z serca. Oby to grajciauiciu lyle soraie. Ksawo jak to
o riniak z ustawicem zimey golyj prolaaed fryjkaay tych
objawo: u miteko uoort dorniaaduei jak uiuotylony. Jute: stooe
o dohej sytuacji, gelyi odwalite: z: pte: i: uan: taaue uee doh:.
Porucuei zaleci si do wlohy - do jchicki grae zapetenei uogoh,
Ktorely odlewoaly ci: od gaudaoci: i: skiemaly, o gupetocie:

Ja dohri uueoau si: Lepiej i: gupetocia si: Poproba tutaj
ladua. Z uapoueych a: kupa opowia p. Wodankiej e k: toz
apto si: uideaj: Nic mi robiz.

Niestety z artykulem Tonie stalo si: to, co przewidywalem. Choc
kenu u: pnia, uueoau to ze powoicij uis dla Indydlerki:
Prop si: z: Tyrodok: uiaer: top: uie zamiecia - g: uer: tly
uajst: saen ze tny strony! Protop: jenne lypuetly, abe ska-
uaunder auct: kniuchiny lyle l: gny, bo powoicijne g: iue.
Zolze uie si:, ze uistuduo lyle l: uiektore uioity,
uodajice teeno artykulowi Charakter aktualny. Nabyt
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Z saudcauem frontap: u krajueluugi: i: uio: s: ude
pnuuouo: qo do bamony

Witold Gombrowicz

59

Letter from Witold Gombrowicz to Bruno Schulz
from the beginning of January 1938, Museum of
Literature in Warsaw

speeches of other people and with disgust at my own reading”¹²³. He had left the premises before the discussion ended because he felt overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to talk to him and offer contrary views¹²⁴. The discussion that started with the reading about *Ferdydurke* moved to the pages of magazines, where numerous reports and extreme comments appeared. Gombrowicz was grateful to Schulz, who not only gave his novel the highest praise, but also provoked another wave of discussions about *Ferdydurke* – regardless of the fact that he exposed himself to numerous attacks from critics, and the reading enraged “all the mandarins of the time”¹²⁵. And not only during the discussion that took place at the office of the trade union. A statement of Stanisław Piasecki is a case in point: at the end of January, he called Schulz’s enthusiasm towards *Ferdydurke* a symptom of psychosis¹²⁶. On January 18, Schulz informed Romana Halpern: “Gombrowicz writes to me that we did him a huge favour, that the effect was perfect, as he is informed from everywhere, and he says he is obliged to us”. “One way or another, it is of great importance for the book, it stimulates, creates a sensation, emboldens those who are of a similar opinion and creates a movement” – these are Gombrowicz’s words¹²⁷. The sensation and movement that Gombrowicz wrote about were also manifested in announcements, comments and reports from Schulz’s speech, which appeared in the press on those days¹²⁸.

Even years later, Gombrowicz will write about Schulz’s paper on *Ferdydurke* as an almost heroic act; he expressed such a view in private letters¹²⁹, in *Dziennik* and in *Wspomnienia polskie*: “Who was the first to dare to throw all his enthusiasm into the scale of the growing discussion about *Ferdydurke*, if not my grand late friend, Bruno Schulz?”¹³⁰. The same thought comes back every now and then: Schulz was the first person to understand and support him, regardless of the costs.

Schulz continued the discussion about Gombrowicz and his work in his private correspondence. Among Schulz’s preserved letters, we find only two

123 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 94.

124 “I am not immune to people who impose themselves on me, and a lot of people attacked me” – ibidem, letter no. I 95, p. 160. See also: W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik...*, p. 656.

125 Ibidem.

126 S. Piasecki, *Czarowanie gałką w zębach*, „Prosto z Mostu”, 30 stycznia 1938, no. 7 (173). Schulz’s name does not appear in the article, but the context (a lecture at a discussion meeting) is almost entirely clear.

127 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, s. 160.

128 See *Odczyt o Gombrowiczu*, „Apel” 1938, no. 17, dodatek artystyczno-literacki „Kuriera Porannego”, no. 16, p. 1; *Odczyt o nowej powieści Gombrowicza*, „Czas” 1938, no. 8, p. 10; *Schulz o Gombrowiczu*, „Nowy Dziennik”, 15 stycznia 1938, no. 15, p. 10; *To nie była dyskusja lecz demonstracja*, „Czas”, 19 stycznia 1938, no. 18, p. 6; *Tydzień kulturalny. W kraju*, „Tygodnik ilustrowany”, 23 stycznia 1938, no. 4, p. 81.

129 See letter to Józef Wittlin from April 1961 (*Walka o sławę*, cz. 1), to Artur Sandauer of June 19, 1961 (*Walka o sławę*, cz. 1), to Jerzy Gombrowicz of July 3, 1961 (*Listy do rodziny*).

130 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 91.

addressees to whom he wrote about *Ferdydurke*: Zenon Waśniewski (“Make sure to read *Ferdydurke* – a brilliant work!”¹³¹) and Romana Halpern (“revealing and sensational”¹³²). However, we can find traces of many similar conversations in letters from Wanda Kragen, Maria Flukowska, Artur Sandauer, Witkacy and Izydor Berman. These people were most likely to respond to mentions of Gombrowicz’s work, which were formulated by Schulz in the lost letters.

We only have a small part of his correspondence, but based on it we can assume that he informed many, if not all, of his correspondents about *Ferdydurke*.

January–February 1938: Gombrowicz’s pessimism

Despite Schulz’s efforts, Gombrowicz was still pessimistic about the future of his novel. “You are too optimistic about the situation of *Ferdydurke* and myself”¹³³ – he shrugged off his friend’s enthusiasm. He was also concerned about the rejection of Schulz’s text by “Wiadomości Literackie”: “Contrary to what you write, I consider it a serious blow to *Ferdydurke*”¹³⁴. Gombrowicz, just like after his debut, noticed malicious criticism everywhere. He claimed that he was then the greatest enemy of Stanisław Piasecki from the “Prosto z Mostu” magazine, who, after reading fragments of his novel, “felt stunned, spat and, instead of printing it, declared war on me”¹³⁵. Schulz himself did not share Gombrowicz’s concerns and discredited the attacks against him. About Piasecki’s text¹³⁶, which expressed sharp criticism of the author of *Ferdydurke*, he wrote the following: “He is vulgar and stupid”¹³⁷.

January–February 1938: Stanisław Brochwicz – Gombrowicz’s acquaintance

Shortly after the lecture, Schulz made contact with one of Gombrowicz’s friends, Stanisław Brochwicz, who offered him help regarding the translation of *The Street of Crocodiles* into German¹³⁸. Perhaps it was not an empty promise, because as a Nazi agent he certainly had great opportunities. He gave Schulz the contact details of a woman translator from Vienna, whom Schulz, in fact, had known long before. However, Romana Halpern warned Schulz against collaborating

131 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 48, p. 92.

132 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, p. 158.

133 Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 10, p. 279.

134 Ibidem.

135 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 98.

136 S. Piasecki, *Czarowanie gałązką w zębach*.

137 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

138 Schulz writes about this in a letter to Romana Halpern – see ibidem, letter no. I 94, p. 159.

with a man who did not hide his fascist and anti-Semitic views: “Thank you for your warning about Brochwicz. I am not writing to him. I am waiting for him to write something”¹³⁹. Gombrowicz’s circle believed that Brochwicz only pretends to be an agent (“Poor Brochwicz pretends to be a spy, but he won’t fool us”¹⁴⁰). Gombrowicz himself later explained that he only realized this during their joint trip to Rome in March 1938¹⁴¹, after a series of strange events involving Brochwicz (“I suddenly understood. It was in the Vatican, when I was walking through the halls – yes, he must have been a Nazi agent!”¹⁴²). Earlier, Brochwicz asked Schulz to write a review of his book *Matki czuwają* [Mothers Are Watching]. As you can see, anti-Semitism did not prevent him from courting the renowned Jewish writer. Schulz replied that he had given up writing reviews, but he liked the book – because he did not want to alienate Brochwicz. However, he did not have the best opinion about the collection itself: “I have the impression that it is a graphomaniac book, though apparently Gombrowicz was delighted with it (I don’t know if he is being sincere)”¹⁴³. Indeed, Gombrowicz positively assessed Brochwicz’s book, as evidenced by his review, which appeared on February 26, 1938 in “Kurier Poranny”¹⁴⁴. Gombrowicz must have shown it to Schulz earlier, because he informed Romana Halpern already in mid-February: “I am very surprised that Gombrowicz wrote such a good review of Brochwicz. I couldn’t read this book, but please don’t tell anyone, because I naturally told him that I liked it”¹⁴⁵. Probably after Gombrowicz returned from Italy, contact with Brochwicz ceased. In 1941, Brochwicz was sentenced to death by the underground court for collaboration and consequently stabbed to death.

During this time, Schulz and Gombrowicz exchanged letters regularly. In February 1938, Schulz wrote: “I am constantly in contact with Gombrowicz”¹⁴⁶. They probably talked about Gombrowicz’s departure to Italy, the future of *Ferdynand* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and about chances for these books in the literary contest organised by “Wiadomości Literackie”. At that time, the issue of the award for the best book published in 1937 was being decided. Schulz expected that Gombrowicz would receive the award – though he was hoping to get it himself, too¹⁴⁷. “I would love to take this award mainly

139 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, p. 161.

140 J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 227.

141 In *Wspomnienia polskie*, Gombrowicz incorrectly states that he made this trip in April or May. March is indicated by the entries in *Kronos* and Schulz’s letter to Romana Halpern of March 31, 1938, which mentions Gombrowicz’s return to Warsaw.

142 W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 136.

143 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 97, p. 164.

144 See W. Gombrowicz, *Książki. Matki i mężczyźni*, “Kurier Poranny”, 26 lutego 1938, no. 57, p. 3.

145 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 98, p. 165.

146 See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

147 See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 98, p. 164–165.

because it is a bridge to go beyond the Polish language. And money means something too!”¹⁴⁸ – he wrote to Romana Halpern. Ultimately, none of them received the award, which was given to Jeremi Wasiutyński for his monograph *Kopernik. Twórca nowego nieba*.

March–April 1938: Schulz returns to *Ferdydurke*

At the beginning of March 1938, Gombrowicz went to Italy with Stanisław Brochwicz. At that time, Schulz received no news from him. “Gombrowicz is not in Warsaw. He doesn’t send me anything¹⁴⁹ – he reported in a letter from March 20, 1938. Gombrowicz contacted his friend at the end of the month, when he returned to Poland. On March 31, Schulz noted: “Gombrowicz’s recently come to Warsaw and written to me after a long break”¹⁵⁰. He might have described to Schulz his thoughts on being an artist, perhaps he reported disturbing political events he experienced while staying in Austria (the invasion by the German Reich), or shared his observations about Brochwicz. Schulz decided to return to the topic of *Ferdydurke*, came to Warsaw and had a “rather fundamental conversation” with Gombrowicz. Schulz could not understand this apathy of the friend he considered a genius. “He bitterly reproached me for not being personally up to par with what I was writing. I was sitting in a chair, mumbling something stupid, and inwardly I agreed with him that he was right. I wasn’t up to par. Me, a specialist at inferiority, I was also below my own work, me, a private person, some rural-urban Gombrowicz... Why couldn’t I celebrate victory?”¹⁵¹.

April 1938: Gombrowicz and Witkiewicz read *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*

At that time, Gombrowicz was reading *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which he rated very highly, and he praised Schulz on an ongoing basis. “Gombrowicz writes me many compliments about my book”, the latter reported¹⁵². Impressed by the book, Gombrowicz wrote a critical sketch devoted to it.

“Gombrowicz wrote an article about me, which he sent to ‘Kurier Poryanny’¹⁵³ – noted Schulz on April 17, 1938 in a letter to Romana Halpern. The finished text was published on April 24, 1938 in a supplement to “Kurier

148 *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

149 *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 102, p. 171.

150 *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 103, p. 172.

151 W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 49.

152 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 104, p. 173.

153 *ibidem*.

Poranny” under the title *Twórczość Brunona Schulza*¹⁵⁴. Romana Halpern wrote to Schulz on May 15 that it was an “excellent article”¹⁵⁵ about his work. In this text, Gombrowicz tried to explain Schulz’s style and philosophy. In his opinion, Schulz wanted to reach the truth by presenting various masks of reality, combining various forms which existence takes on – in order to separate what is fleeting and transitory (form) from what is permanent and unchanging. He emphasized Schulz’s stylistic skill, but wondered to what extent the modern writer was enslaved by his style. At the same time, Gombrowicz defended non-veristic literature, which, in his view, was the only honest literary form: “the very act of describing imaginary events as if they really happened, giving them the appearance of real life when everyone knows that they were born in our heads, is a regrettable fiction and mystification”¹⁵⁶. Years later, Gombrowicz will remember this review and describe the background of its creation: “I once wrote an article about it for ‘Kurier Poranny’ and then I remembered that I was very afraid that they would say that I was praising him because he praises me... out of this fear, an article was born, not directly about Schulz, but about how his work should be read”¹⁵⁷.

At the same time, *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass* was also read by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (“some of the pages are wonderful!”), who on April 23, 1938 wrote a letter to Schulz in which he informed him about his separation from Czesława Oknińska-Korzeniowska and his poor mental condition¹⁵⁸. He explained why he had not been in touch for some time, and perhaps realized that Schulz had become closer to Gombrowicz. That is why he asked Schulz: “Write right away and comfort me, not taking into account that I have not written to you for so long” – and at the same time expressing hope: “I don’t think Gombrowicz will separate us”¹⁵⁹. In this case, Gombrowicz did not separate them; Schulz fulfilled his friend’s request and wrote a “wonderful letter”. This fact after is confirmed by Witkacy’s reactions, expressed in two letters to his wife (of April 29: “I had a wonderful letter from Schulz”, and April 31: “I got a wonderful letter from Bruno Schulz”¹⁶⁰).

154 W. Gombrowicz, *Twórczość Brunona Schulza*, „Apel”, 24 kwietnia 1938, no. 31, a special literary supplement to “Kurier Poranny”, no. 112, p. 1.

155 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Romana Halpern, no. III 7, p. 275.

156 W. Gombrowicz, “Twórczość Brunona Schulza”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 300.

157 Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 657.

158 S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy II* (vol. 2, part 2), oprac. i przypisami opatrzyli J. Degler, S. Okołowicz, T. Pawlak, Warszawa 2017, letter to Bruno Schulz of April 23, 1938, p. 274.

159 Ibidem, letter to Bruno Schulz of April 23, 1938, p. 275.

160 Idem, *Listy do żony...*, letters no. 1211 and 1212, p. 230–231.

May–June 1938: Trip to Paris and temptation by Christianity

In May 1938, Gombrowicz helped Schulz organize a trip to Paris. The trip was to be made easier because Schulz was going to sign up to the PEN Club and obtain a journalist's ID. Regarding membership in the PEN Club, Gombrowicz contacted Stella Olgierd (Polish Literary Club, ul. Pierackiego 16) by phone, who was then to send Schulz the necessary forms for candidates. In the matter of journalistic credentials, Gombrowicz advised Schulz to write to the editor Wojciech Natanson from "Czas" (ul. Szpitalna 12) "with a proposal to place travel correspondence there"¹⁶¹. Moreover, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz about moving to Warsaw. He also advised him to get closer to Catholicism, which, in his opinion, corresponded to the properties and needs of Schulz's nature: "Your gentleness, mysticism, sublimation, weakness in life, contemplative tendencies (to limit yourself to the most simple things), all these predispose you to this spiritual direction, to Christianity – and I am almost sure that, despite any intellectual (or other) resistance, your nature will accept the atmosphere itself"¹⁶². According to Jerzy Ficowski, Gombrowicz's persuasions were an "experiment" and "an attempt at a psychological procedure"¹⁶³. However, Gombrowicz's preserved letters show that in his private correspondence with Schulz, he was not a calculating experimenter. He tried to address his friend's questions and problems in a factual manner or talked freely about Sandauer's vices – these were not Gombrowicz's tricks known from the letters published in "Studio". But still, in Gombrowicz's view, approaching Christianity was supposed to be more spiritual than dogmatic. The context of the opening sentences of the letter shows that this proposal seemed to be a practical solution to Schulz¹⁶⁴. Gombrowicz's was not the first attempt to connect Schulz with Catholic ideology (not necessarily faith). A few months earlier, Maria Flukowska wrote to him: "I believe most deeply that you will 'end up' in Catholicism. I have been convinced of this for a long time. Certain reviews indicate that your attitude and intellectual dispositions are Catholic (these include, in some parts, the second review about Kuncewiczowa, much truer than the first one)"¹⁶⁵. In this context, which Jerzy Ficowski did not know, one should look differently at Gombrowicz's demands for Schulz to establish closer relations with Christian thought and ideas.

¹⁶¹ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 280.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 279–280.

¹⁶³ J. Ficowski, *Listy do Brunona Schulza*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, note no. 9, p. 416.

¹⁶⁴ B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 279.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, letter from Maria Flukowska, no. III 41, p. 320.

At the same time, in May 1938, Schulz was deprived of access to the Warsaw press, and therefore feeling the critical literary void growing around his work, he asked a friend to send him his review of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which was published in “Apel”¹⁶⁶, a supplement to “Kurier Poranny”¹⁶⁷. Gombrowicz replied (in a letter sent between May 19 and 28) that he would do so as soon as he visited the editorial office of “Kurier” but was also surprised that Schulz did not have adequate access to the press: “I don’t understand why you don’t have a subscription. I rarely read literary and other magazines, but in reviews about me there are often mentions of you, proving that your situation is much better than mine”¹⁶⁸.

In the next preserved letter, from June 1938, Gombrowicz confirmed that the matter of journalistic accreditation had already been resolved, and he himself had telephoned editor Natanson about it. He also returned to the matter of PEN Club membership¹⁶⁹ and informed Schulz that he had no contacts at the Foreign Currency Exchange Headquarters that issued foreign means of payment¹⁷⁰. He also reminded Schulz about his proposal to become spiritually closer to Catholicism, which his corresponded could be achieved by going to Laski¹⁷¹: “Wouldn’t it be good if you went to Laski before leaving for Paris?”¹⁷².

July 1938: Article about *Ferdydurke* in “Skamander”

In July 1938, Schulz’s article about *Ferdydurke* was published in “Skamander”¹⁷³. It is a very erudite and well-thought-out text, and at the same time a piece of fiction itself, almost a full story filled with extraordinary metaphors and brilliant comparisons. It is *Ferdydurke* read in Schulz’s style: “Wherever we plunge our hand into the flesh of the work, we feel the powerful muscles of thought, the biceps and bones of athletic anatomy, not made up with cotton wool and tow.

166 See *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 105, p. 175.

167 “Besides, I don’t know about any reviews because I haven’t subscribed to the press” – see *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 97, p. 164.

168 *Ibidem*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 280.

169 On June 7, 1938, Schulz was already on the PEN Club’s mailing list, so Gombrowicz’s letter to Schulz was probably sent at the beginning of June – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from the Polish branch of the Pen Club, no. III 48, p. 437.

170 Due to the bad economic situation, restrictive foreign currency measures were in force in Poland from 1936, see Z. Landau, *Polityka walutowa rządu polskiego w latach 1936–1939*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1986, z. 2. Schulz had to ask Władysław Zawistowski, the head of the Minister’s Art Department of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, for support. See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Władysław Zawistowski, no. I 61, p. 102–103.

171 In Laski, there was a Center for the Care of the Blind, run in the Christian spirit by nuns from the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross.

172 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 12, p. 281.

173 *Idem*, *Ferdydurke*, “Skamander”, July–September 1938, vol. 12, issue XCVI–XCVIII.

Kochany Bruno!

Idęstawię Tobie o Terd. u stawa Czyna, ojeckoci
ci: Kiedya p wybat p na jenny bypnieciuj p akaraeni w.
Kosniku ponowai dacholi do wraiceni, i jest to wygryz. Cyper.
pucy Krijity u je wystronitnygd frumtak autybet jak o
ciż wyprawo. edyue o ciwies au zowici to poryj aig owasi
spowiedowania, Kibta wyowdu o; chyb stąd, ze to ciwini o
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tykto uowitloweud z ienego frumtak. 20 u owie wyowdu
frumtakci jedlee, ale ciwimowai itatley uowuciel i. j. frumtak
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uwo do keltory yolepa na teau, ze pignowachaca pcciu au.
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ty do pcciuowai fonyj (ciwionaj poytety) do uowicawicawia wy
z tyca kutoteka, u jekoi obowiazany ty uowowota, je strawicau
ze fonyj uawie au wyra au, jat uaw uowowota, i grupy
uow tywici uowowotny z uowowotny fonyj jat grupac' uowotek.
uwo cōta uowowotni uowowotny au tykto uowowotny pcciu
pcciu jedlowotki jest - z frumtak uowicawia jedlowotki.
uowowotny, uowowotny uowowotny dly au. Owoi pcciu
dly choras ta uowowotny, auowotny uowowotny tykto uowowotny
uowowotny jako obowiazany, je stowowotny ty stowowotny au stowowotny.
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ale zowotny z pcciuowotny uowowotny i; to sprawy, ze
stowowotny au do dly ciwii byi, a uowowotny pcciuowotny uowowotny
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pcciuowotny uowowotny uowowotny uowowotny uowowotny uowowotny
uowowotny "to jest uowowotny ciwotny", dly do jekoi uowowotny

Letter from Witold Gombrowicz to Bruno Schulz of July 19 1938, Museum of Literature in Warsaw

„Knievici“ si v tca socu spruci i to jat stanovisko
„publikac“ i kulturne. Len zroca ojac uro uicavici
i bac si duicka ktre zvidelo si z knuziciji jago i jago irocy,
jat ueni tracica, icny, irocy, nevyostoscis - Oti taky irocy
nevyostoscis is vnystnie aone formy, rutytyje etc. Orystko
ueni si objawiany.

Calo trudeosi zapovradheia tego gwstego zrenty stano-
viska jolag as tca - jat guboto i olencis zavoritot - ze
uona onadocosi, lizdy ocus roveu „uicnylchitocis“ uolcy
do ovej irocy nevyostoscis; uovo, ktre prvata jat i vnystko
i uue z kopolajji jednostet, uue uadoje si do vyprovocira
tracis uoprody individualnych - jest to uenochi tyranija
uovet vtedy polj vydoje si ueni ze uos vyrovala. Do prvodyje
konicicosi uoposcia si; v ovej tytyce nevyostoscis jenne o
kask t. u. ze uietycho uenog atotovei vnet, ale jenne uenog
v ty soucy duiki vobovai siobie - vyrimivai vnet i vyfancivai
siobie vyfancivajucego sig - goly; jortava uenog uoi jat v otstavce
vaticieci jortavog voviska vobovog, ale uicovleika, ktry jortava
siobie soucy, jat vov vov. Jat v tca uenochi absolutnyje
vtydo, kku, knuzicica i jortava. Ale dltetogo tca „berfocis“
uue jest a uenie uenog jortavica uos vyrovalicica - jat
to tycho katasofa, stacio sig vobit roji z ktry ktrida jat
svoreucica. „Niedynatoci“ jat jortava vnysto uopatyrovan
Zedkyz jortavog uicok dajcy si vyprovadi z kst. to
knuzicicici dytavo i jony ostrivici v stovuce & formy
(i kulturny) knuzicicici uicovrovanici tca: vyrovane z
peltica vyrovane ich icenoci.

Jak vidim etd antykes div; jortava si jurovostkovic
z uenog stanoviskica v ty sprave, a jivieci uicica klyby
to, ze to co ty uenog jat ktrid uicovleicog (dla ueni/
vnystko) uicovleicog ja uenog as quene uenog uenog jest
uostk; tca; jortavog i vobitvych uenog ja. Jat v uenog
viele vnety i guboket uenog i chovisic, ze si go vyprovoc
ktrida, ze uie vobit vobit; uenog uenog vnystko
pod vygledu stylitvymog. Poprosti. Jydra dltne ueni
vobit. Vnystka tca vobit vobit ze uie uenog juri
si; uenog spras vobitvych.

Co do dvoju ktridana to trudeo ueni uenog vobitvici
polj; uie uenog tego uenog uenog vobit vobit - jurtis
daja si on uenog vobit vobit si to tca. Uenog! Tca
vobit jat vobit uenog vobit uenog vobit uenog vobit
vobit - pod vygledu vobitvymog. 19. IV. 1919



This book is bursting with an excess of ideas, overflowing with creative and destructive energy¹⁷⁴ – in other words, it reminded one of Schulz's *Book*. In his article, Schulz rather vividly described the complicated nature of *Ferdydurke* and the discovery made by Gombrowicz. This discovery was of the duality of human forms, which are divided into official ones, representing only a part of human existence, and those rejected, located behind the scenes, in the “annex of our self”¹⁷⁵. Gombrowicz, according to Schulz, significantly exceeded the achievements of Freud in this dimension thanks to the fact that he used “convulsions of laughter” instead of seriousness. Freud considered these subconscious contents of our existence as a kind of pathology, while Gombrowicz, looking through the “lens of the grotesque”¹⁷⁶, thought they were the essence of man¹⁷⁷.

Schulz drew attention to Gombrowicz's discovery already during their exchange of letters in “Studio” (“I consider it a great merit that you, for the first time, guided our thoughts and feelings to these matters”), but it was only after reading *Ferdydurke* that he understood Gombrowicz's “conspiracies with the dragon” and the role of “pranking the crowd”¹⁷⁸ – which had previously caused him anxiety. All these conclusions about Gombrowicz's novel, Schulz referred to the entire culture, which consists of a thin official layer and the entire abyss, which is a littered cultural rubble: “It is a cesspool of immaturity, a realm of disgrace and shame, mismatches and shortcomings, a pathetic garbage dump of culture”¹⁷⁹.

Schulz's allegations against *Ferdydurke*

Interestingly, contrary to popular belief, Schulz's review is not a one-sided apotheosis of Gombrowicz's novel. Schulz noticed some theoretical imperfections in *Przedmowa do Filidora dzieckiem podszytego*. The chapter outlines the program of the change to which artists and writers are to be subjected, but only the second-rate ones – and this reservation worried Schulz. Gombrowicz wrote: “Believe me: there is a great difference between an artist who has already come true and a bunch of half-artists and quarter-artists who just want to come true. And what befits an artist who is already finished in his entire profile has a different meaning in yourself [...] Believe me, it is high time to develop and establish the attitude of a second-rate writer, otherwise all people will feel sick”¹⁸⁰. Schulz noted that creating exceptions in this way is harmful to the whole concept. In his opinion,

174 Idem, *Ferdydurke*, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 147–148.

175 Ibidem, p. 144.

176 Ibid p. 142–144.

177 Experiments with form were therefore a path for Gombrowicz to achieve full humanity.

178 B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, p. 213 and 216.

179 Idem, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 145.

180 W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, p. 69 and 71.

Gombrowicz was afraid of the one-sidedness of his own theory, which is an inherent feature of every great system of thought. Moreover, he was very concerned about the problematic distinction between first-rate and second-rate writers. The inaccuracy of this division seemed to Schulz unworthy of the “master of relativism and believer in concreteness”, that is, of the author of *Ferdydurke*. As a consequence, Schulz demonstrated the “imbalance” of Gombrowicz’s ideology, which the creator himself had “betrayed” because he limited it with exceptions. “The exceptions that Gombrowicz makes weaken the credit of his theory”¹⁸¹.

Schulz also pointed to the predecessor of *Ferdydurke*, which was, in his opinion, “premature and therefore ineffective”¹⁸² – that is, Karol Irzykowski’s *Pałuba*. A similar conclusion was also presented by Artur Sandauer in a letter to Schulz of July 11, 1938: “I have recently read *Pałuba*; an excellent book. The theme is almost identical to the one I came up with in *Ferdydurke*; but maybe a little shallower, because is strictly intellectual”¹⁸³.

It is worth noting that today we do not know the exact content of the reading that took place on January 11, 1938 (this is a common error in many studies)¹⁸⁴, but only its magazine version (with which Schulz was dissatisfied), after unidentified editorial corrections and perhaps also abbreviations. Schulz’s article was previously rejected by “Wiadomości Literackie” due to its excessive length.

Concerned, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz on this matter: “I’m afraid that ‘Tygodnik’ won’t publish it either – it would take up three pages! There are still ‘Sygnały’, but ‘Skamander’, even its April issue, would certainly be better”¹⁸⁵. On January 23, Schulz informed Romana Halpern that Mieczysław Grydzewski had already accepted the text of the speech for publication¹⁸⁶ (“Grydzewski has already accepted it for Skamander, I just have to send it to him”¹⁸⁷). However, the text was not included in the next issue, published in April–June, and had to wait for publication until July.

181 B. Schulz, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 148.

182 Ibidem, p. 149.

183 Idem, *Księga listów*, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 33, p. 310.

184 For example: K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 327–328.

185 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 10, p. 279.

186 Together with the article about *Ferdydurke*, Schulz sent Artur Sandauer’s text about *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* to “Skamander”, but it was not published. Sandauer notes with regret: “The new ‘Skamander’ has already been published. Your article about Gombrowicz is there, but mine about you is not” – see. B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166; and a letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 34, p. 311.

187 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 96, p. 162.

July 1938: “One of the most profound analyses of *Ferdydurke*”

Shortly after the publication in “Skamander”, on July 19, 1938, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz that he had read his review again and still considered it “the best article ever written about the book, comprehensive in its most important points”¹⁸⁸. He also sent Schulz his comments to the text, which, in his opinion, lacked emphasis on the problem of the relationship between human personality and form – though Schulz raises this problem many times: “So far, man has seen himself through the prism of a ready and finished form, he has seen himself from the side of the official façade [...]. All the poor tailoring of his form, sewn with thick stitches, escaped his notice”¹⁸⁹. In his summary, however, Gombrowicz emphasized that, apart from minor differences, Schulz’s thoughts almost coincide with his position on *Ferdydurke*. It seems that Schulz was not satisfied with this publication. Perhaps he was concerned with the changes that could have been made in the text by the editor of “Skamander”, Mieczysław Grydzewski – Schulz wrote about it to Gombrowicz in one of the missing letters. We only know Gombrowicz’s reply: “There are many great things in it [Schulz’s published speech] and many deep places and I’m surprised that you deny it [...] Grydz’s corrections did it good”¹⁹⁰. Years later, Gombrowicz repeatedly mentioned and analysed Schulz’s conclusions contained in the article, considering it “one of the most profound analyses of *Ferdydurke*”¹⁹¹, and the reading itself simply an act of heroism. According to Jerzy Jarzębski, it was Schulz’s text published in “Skamander”, constituting “an enthusiastic, selfless apotheosis” of *Ferdydurke*, that paved the way for Gombrowicz “to the Polish Parnassus”¹⁹².

July–October 1938: Depression, *Messiah*, Paris

In July 1938, in now-lost letters to Gombrowicz, Schulz wrote, among other things, about his poor health (Sandauer wrote to Schulz on July 5: “Gombrowicz also writes to me that he is concerned about your constant depression”¹⁹³), as well as about the slowly emerging novel *Messiah*. These two issues were probably related. *Messiah* had been in the works for many years, and the creative process was to be additionally interrupted by a trip to Paris. Schulz did not reveal details

188 Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 281–282.

189 Idem, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 144.

190 Idem, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 284.

191 W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 47.

192 J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 55.

193 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 32, p. 309–310.

about *Messiah*, he only counted on a voice of support that would make him believe in the sense of continuing to write. On July 19, both Sandauer, who advised against going to Paris because of *Messiah*, and Gombrowicz wrote to him: “As for your *Messiah*, it is difficult for me to say anything, because I do not know this work even in its assumptions – if it gives you the opportunity to refresh yourself, so much the better! This postulate is important not for the sake of your art, but for yourself – mentally¹⁹⁴.”

Ultimately, Schulz decided to go to Paris¹⁹⁵, where he arrived on July 31, 1938. He left the French capital on August 26, 1938 – three days later, he wrote to Romana Halpern that he “got rid of some illusions, about a global career”¹⁹⁶. Schulz’s triumph in Paris was to come only in the 1960s, when his stories were published, as Gombrowicz claimed: “with great honours”, when he was treated as “one of the greatest contemporary writers”¹⁹⁷.

In October, Schulz stayed in Warsaw for a day and a half. He was in a bad mental state. He came to discuss cooperation with “Wiadomości Literackie”, but otherwise he did not meet anyone. He did not visit Romana Halpern or Sandauer, who both wanted to meet him. He also did not manage to meet Gombrowicz. Schulz’s depression is associated with political events¹⁹⁸ and the publication in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” about Egga van Haardt¹⁹⁹ – a young and talented artist who charmed both Schulz and Gombrowicz.

June 1937 – August 1938: Egga van Haardt – “I really like this blonde”

The history of this fascination probably began in June 1937, when Haardt made her debut as an artist, exhibiting her works at Garliński’s Art Salon at ul. Mazowiecka 8 in Warsaw. The exhibition had a motto taken from *Treatise on Tailor’s Dummies*, which appeared in invitations and catalogues²⁰⁰. Moreover, the exhibition, consisting of one hundred and fifty cut-out pictures, also presented the “most deeply felt” series of illustrations for *The Street of Crocodiles*. The reviewer argued that “this book certainly had quite an influence on the final

194 Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 284.

195 For more about Schulz’s trip to Paris, see Ł. Chomycz, *Wyjazd Brunona Schulza do Francji*, “Schulz / Forum” 11, 2018.

196 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 110, p. 180.

197 W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 278–279.

198 In October 1938, Adolf Hitler annexed the Sudetenland, which was part of Czechoslovakia.

199 See B. Schulz, *Egga van Haardt*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, 2 października 1938, no. 40, p. 773–774.

200 “Our creations will be as if they were makeshift, made for single use. If they are people, we will give them, for example, only one side of the face, one arm, one leg, exactly the one they will need” – see M. Wallis, *Wystawy. Egga Haardt*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 4 lipca 1937, no. 28 (714), p. 6.

formation of Egga Hardt's expression, and the sentence quoted at the beginning characterizes the entire exhibition very well"²⁰¹.

Did Egga make contact with Schulz before her first opening, or was it only the publicity around the exhibition, referring to *The Street of Crocodiles*, that prompted Schulz to make acquaintance with the brilliant artist – it is not known²⁰². They certainly already knew each other in late 1937. At that time, Gombrowicz also became interested in her. At the turn of 1937 and 1938, Egga visited him in Zakopane, of which he informed Schulz in a letter of January 9, 1938: "Haardt has arrived, I like this blonde very much, she is my type of woman, but she has already left"²⁰³. Schulz knew that Egga van Haardt was no longer in Zakopane because that day he was leaving Poznań, where they had met and talked for several days. Most likely he must have stayed at the apartment of hers and Jerzy Brodnicki's²⁰⁴. Gombrowicz probably mentioned Haardt in his subsequent letters, which Schulz had written about to Romana Halpern. In a letter of January 18, 1938, he wrote: "Gombrowicz likes Egga Haardt very much, he intends to continue making this acquaintance in Warsaw since she's made a great impression on him"²⁰⁵. Piotr Sitkiewicz notes that during this period both writers "entered into some unspecified competition for the affections of the newly met artist"²⁰⁶. Romana Halpern, a friend of Schulz and Gombrowicz, noticed this rivalry. She probably asked Schulz about it in one of the lost letters she sent to him in January 1938. She must have inquired asking about Schulz's commitment and his reaction to Gombrowicz's announcements. Schulz answered her question in a letter of January 23, 1938: "As for Egga Haardt – I am not involved, and the danger of involvement is not threatening for me at all. The only dangerous thing for me is a woman's strong emotional involvement. I am a reactive nature, and it happens to me, but even rarely. Nevertheless, I will write to Gombrowicz not to disturb me. It is nice of him to be so loyal in the matter"²⁰⁷. Gombrowicz had informed Schulz that he intended to continue his relationship with Egga – probably asking for his opinion or consent. Schulz declared his lack of involvement, apparently

201 J. Stokowski, *Plastyka. Wystawa Eggi Haardt*, "ABC", 1 lipca 1937, no. 205, p. 4.

202 Anna Kaszuba-Dębska suggests that they made the acquaintance during the exhibition – see A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, Gdańsk 2015, p. 272.

203 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 9, p. 278. Even before Gombrowicz's letter was found, Piotr Sitkiewicz deduced from a mysterious note from *Kronos* that Gombrowicz must have met Egga in Zakopane: "Zakopane. Dom Bankowców (?). Skiwski's article. V. Erdt (?). Fear [...]" – see P. Sitkiewicz, *Bruno Schulz w Poznaniu*, "Schulz/Forum" 5, 2015, p. 138.

204 On January 5, he wrote to Zenon Waśniewski: "Your letter reached me in Poznań, where I am staying with a certain friend [...] I am staying with very nice and intelligent people" – B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 48, p. 92.

205 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, p. 161.

206 P. Sitkiewicz, *Bruno Schulz w Poznaniu*, p. 138.

207 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 96, p. 162.

Kochany Bruno,

Zawsze ja obywateli Twojego Liberałstwa
 si i Cerkwie i obywateli Twojego oświecenia. Cerkwie
 oświecenia, i obywateli to, ale gdzie uścisnąć w Twoim słownym doświadczeniu
 sportawam, i redaktorzy podła ofiarę oświecenia i słowny Haardt
 polski i oświecenia i uścisnąć i to depensować się tej uścisnąć.
 uścisnąć: bolec tego sprawo gwałtowny gwałtowny oświecenia, a to
 z góry Twoim uścisnąć i i uścisnąć pewny czy Haardt uścisnąć
 dysponuje jakimiś abutami: uścisnąć uścisnąć Cerkwie to uścisnąć
 uścisnąć uścisnąć. Porównanie uścisnąć, i porady C. uścisnąć
 uścisnąć si i Cerkwie sportawam, ale uścisnąć uścisnąć, i
 uścisnąć uścisnąć przez gwałtowny si i Cerkwie uścisnąć
 z góry uścisnąć si i Cerkwie uścisnąć uścisnąć przez
 Cerkwie to uścisnąć uścisnąć, i uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć
 do Cerkwie. Z uścisnąć to uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć
 decyzyjnie z góry słowny, gwałtowny uścisnąć, i uścisnąć uścisnąć
 uścisnąć; porady C, a to decyzyjnie uścisnąć uścisnąć. Cerkwie
 jest skomplikowany i gwałtowny uścisnąć Twoim sportawam,
 jednakoż uścisnąć C. uścisnąć uścisnąć redakcyjnie Kłosał
 uścisnąć uścisnąć, i tekst uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć.
 uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć i i Cerkwie. uścisnąć
 uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć; (uścisnąć uścisnąć) uścisnąć
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 komentary uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć.

Nie jestem pewny czy uścisnąć to je Twoim uścisnąć;
 ależby uścisnąć uścisnąć słowny gwałtowny uścisnąć, ale
 uścisnąć uścisnąć Twoim słowny. uścisnąć uścisnąć
 uścisnąć Twoim uścisnąć, jednakoż uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć i
 uścisnąć uścisnąć si i uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć, i uścisnąć uścisnąć
 uścisnąć uścisnąć; słowny uścisnąć i uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć
 uścisnąć uścisnąć uścisnąć, i uścisnąć uścisnąć i uścisnąć uścisnąć
 si. Ale decyzyjnie, sam. Twoim uścisnąć.

Letter from Witold Gombrowicz to Bruno Schulz from October 1938, Museum of Literature in Warsaw

giving Gombrowicz his permission to develop the bond with Haardt²⁰⁸. Anna Kaszuba-Dębska is perhaps right when she claims that Schulz was primarily interested in getting in touch with Thomas Mann²⁰⁹, which Egga van Haardt and Jerzy Brodnicki were supposed to make easier for him²¹⁰.

In February 1938, Schulz continued to correspond with Egga, as reported by Romana Halpern (letter of February 21): “I constantly receive enthusiastic comments about my book from Egga Haardt and her friend”²¹¹. They also talked about illustrations for *The Comet*, which was to be published soon. In March, the correspondence stopped: “Egga Haardt became silent, too”²¹². The artist replied on March 23, explaining the silence with work and personal trouble. She announced that Schulz’s novella *Die Heimkehr*, along with her drawings, would be presented to Thomas Mann around April 10, when Brodnicki’s mother was supposed to reach Zurich²¹³. Egga’s letter was extremely kind and friendly. Their relationship seemed to be at its best. On August 21, *The Comet* was finally published in “Wiadomości Literackie”, along with eight illustrations by Haardt²¹⁴.

October 1938: Manipulated article in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”

However, everything changed on October 2, when “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” published an article titled “Egga van Haardt”. Before publication, Schulz made the manuscript available to the artist so that she could remove the fragments that would be, in her opinion, too intimate. However, “Tygodnik” received a modified text containing completely new sentences and thoughts that were not written by Schulz and which he himself considered “highly distasteful and scandalous in form”²¹⁵. This was a great cause for concern for him. “Recently, I feel very sorry for Egga Haardt, who turned out to be a common scandal-monger, blackmailer and cheat”²¹⁶ – he wrote in a letter of October 13. At that

208 What is surprising, perhaps, is the fact that in Gombrowicz’s two-volume biography, the name of Egga van Haardt was mentioned only once, and only in the context of Bruno Schulz’s article.

209 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, p. 275 and 279.

210 Egga and “her friend” (as Schulz calls Brodnicki) compared *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass* with Mann’s *The Tales of Jacob* and claimed that they would be able to provide Schulz with contact with Mann himself. As a result, around April 10, 1938, Brodnicki’s mother, traveling to Zurich, brought Mann a novella by Schulz entitled *Die Heimkehr* with illustrations by Egga van Haardt.

211 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166–167.

212 Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 103, p. 172.

213 See Ibidem, letter from Egga van Haardt, no. III 39, p. 316.

214 See B. Schulz, *Kometa*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 21 sierpnia 1938, no. 35 (774), p. 2–3.

215 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 111, p. 181.

216 Ibidem.

time, he only contacted Gombrowicz: “Apart from Gombrowicz, I do not receive letters from anyone – I am completely abandoned”²¹⁷. He consulted Gombrowicz, too, about the article on Egga van Haardt. He sent him his statement regarding the manipulated text and made Gombrowicz his representative for negotiations with Waclaw Czarski, editor-in-chief of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”. It was not clear from Schulz’s statement who edited the text, so Czarski announced that he would have to reveal that the changes were made by Egga van Haardt herself. As Gombrowicz reported to his friend, then “the matter would have taken a more serious turn, and since your letters show that you are not sure whether Haardt has any advantages, I could not take it on my own responsibility”²¹⁸. If Schulz were to decide to publish his explanations, Gombrowicz advised to modify them in such a way that they would not require additional comments from the editors, he also suggested that it should be noted that “the text was changed where it talks about art”²¹⁹. However, he advised Schulz to keep calm – he announced that he would inform other editorial offices about this manipulation in order to avoid comments and press reactions. He also argued that Schulz had no reason to worry about the public, because “it doesn’t know anything anyway”²²⁰.

October 1938: Fear of Egga

Ultimately, Schulz followed Gombrowicz’s advice and did not issue any statement regarding the manipulated text. On October 29, 1938, he wrote to Romana Halpern: “I will take the opportunity to tell you what made me let this forgery go unpunished and not investigate the matter”²²¹. It is not known what “advantages” of Egga prompted Schulz to remain silent on this matter; Piotr Sitkiewicz even writes about the writer’s “indefinite fear” – which he himself admitted in a letter to Romana Halpern: “I am afraid of her, because she is a person capable of anything”²²².

Perhaps it was all about the same thing, i.e. contact with Tomasz Mann. Schulz probably still hoped to make contact with the German writer, and an open conflict with Egga, the author of the illustrations for *Die Heimkehr*, could make it difficult for him. It is not known whether, after the publication in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, Schulz or Gombrowicz ever contacted Haardt – a “participant of the

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. I 15, p. 286.

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

²²⁰ Ibidem.

²²¹ Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 112, p. 183.

²²² Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 111, p. 181–182.

early beginnings” transformed into a smile, “the young ephebus”, “Salamandra”, which possessed “all the nuances of creation”²²³.

At the end of October 1938, Schulz mainly exchanged letters with the author of *Ferdydurke* – “My reduction of correspondence is general and apart from Gombrowicz I communicate with no one”²²⁴ – apart from Romana Halpern, of course, to whom he reported his loneliness.

Emil Breiter – Bruno Schulz’s literary school?

Schulz’s and Gombrowicz’s respective works have been compared many times. They themselves emphasized primarily the differences between them, even though Gombrowicz admitted that the common element of their work was literary mystification²²⁵, experimenting with form²²⁶ and hermeticity²²⁷. We should also mention the use of the grotesque, trash, parody and combining autobiographical and literary themes²²⁸. Sometimes some plot similarities were pointed out, for example *Ferdydurke* was claimed to be based on an idea from Schulz’s short story entitled “Emeryt” [A Pensioner]²²⁹. Their respective texts were juxtaposed in a rather unfortunate manner by Emil Breiter in an article published on May 29, 1938 in “Wiadomości Literackie”. While positively reviewing *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, Breiter wrote in the summary that Schulz created a literary school, which included, among others, Gombrowicz²³⁰. Of course, this was not true and must have made both writers uncomfortable. Schulz, perhaps at Gombrowicz’s instigation, wrote a correction to the editor of “Wiadomości Literackie”, regarding Breiter’s argument. It was an uncomfortable situation for him. He had the impression that little was said or written about *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and one of the few reviews required his intervention. He tried to handle it in “as delicate a form as possible”, so as not to offend a favourable critic, and at the same time do justice to Gombrowicz²³¹.

223 Bruno Schulz, *Egga van Haardt*, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 150–151.

224 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 112, p. 183.

225 W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 278–279.

226 Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 663.

227 Witold Gombrowicz, letter to François Bondy of February 21, 1962, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie. Świadectwa i dokumenty 1963–1969*, przekład O. Hedemann, M. Ochab, J. Juryś, W. Karpiński, J. Jarzębski, tekst polskiego wydania przejrzał J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1993, p. 93.

228 Based on these similarities, Aleksander Fiut includes Schulz and Gombrowicz among postmodernist writers in the *avant la lettre* school, see A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowką z Wilczej*, p. 162–163.

229 P. Kuncewicz, *Schulz i Gombrowicz*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1984, no. 30, p. 27–30.

230 E. Breiter, “*Sanatorjum pod Klepsydrą*” Schulza, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 29 maja 1938, no. 23 (762), p. 4.

231 It is interesting that in a letter from May 28, 1938 to Romana Halpern (“You have probably read Breiter’s review about me”), Schulz not only described the review that was published a day later, i.e. on May 29, 1938, but also had already written and sent to Mieczysław Grydzewski his corrections.

“I felt very sorry for Breiter, but I considered it a duty of loyalty to Gombrowicz”²³². Schulz’s corrective text was published in “Wiadomości Literackie” on June 19, 1938²³³. In it, Schulz proved the complete originality and uniqueness of the author *Ferdydurke*: “He operates in a completely different dimension of reality than I do, he belongs – despite appearances suggesting the contrary – to a completely different writing family and to a different spiritual formation”²³⁴. Developing this idea, he used phrases such as: “incommensurability of internal worlds”, “difference”, “individuality”, “autonomy”, “distinctiveness”. So what was the result of this combination of the works of such different and independent writers? Schulz replied: “Our names and work must have been associated by some accident, by coincidence, that is, the relative simultaneity of the occurrence, the bluntness of the treatment of conventional reality (having different sources in both cases), and especially the difficulty to classify the texts, common to both”²³⁵. However, Schulz and Gombrowicz believed that a strong voice from the outside was still needed, clearly demarcating their work. Both of them individually suggested to Sandauer that he should write an article in this tone: “A few days ago I received a letter from Gombrowicz in which (like you) he proposes that I write an article demarcating your works in opposition to Breiter”²³⁶.

Despite Schulz’s immediate reaction to the review in “Wiadomości Literackie”, the myth of the “Schulz group” continued to circulate widely²³⁷. An example is Stefan Pomer’s writing about Franz Kafka: “Suffice it to say that in Poland one of his followers, Bruno Schulz, has already managed to create something of a literary school and the most interesting young Polish prose writers, such as Rudnicki, Gombrowicz, Ważyk, Kuczyński, Otwinowski, etc., actually come from this Jewish-Czech writer”²³⁸.

232 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, I 106, p. 176.

233 The correction was printed on the last page, in the correspondence section, under the title *Schulz i Gombrowicz*, see B. Schulz, *Schulz i Gombrowicz. Do redaktora “Wiadomości Literackich”*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 19 czerwca 1938, no. 26 (765), p. 8.

234 B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Mieczysław Grydzewski, I 72, p. 127.

235 Ibidem.

236 Ibidem, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 32, p. 309.

237 Even though both writers firmly denied that they represented a common literary school, in Japan the works of Schulz and Gombrowicz were published together. In 1967, a volume was published in Tokyo containing *The Street of Crocodiles*, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos*. In 1977, Schulz’s works were re-published in Japanese, this time accompanied by *Ferdydurke*.

238 S. Pomer, *Literatura na szerokim świecie*, “5ta rano”, 16 października 1938, no. 287 (2887), p. 11.

Sandauer and Vogler

Gombrowicz wrote years later that Schulz and himself were more connected by public opinion than they were by each other²³⁹. Of ground-breaking importance here were primarily the articles of Artur Sandauer, who included both writers in the “school of mythologists”²⁴⁰, and Henryk Vogler, who wrote: “Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz are the two most outstanding and most characteristic young Polish fiction writers. They lock themselves within the boundaries of their individuality – those features that distinguish Polish literature from other European literatures”²⁴¹. In turn, Artur Sandauer, shortly after Schulz’s speech on *Ferdynand*, on January 22, 1938, gave a lecture in Cracow, in the hall of the Jewish Theatre Society at ul. Stolarska 9, titled *Fantasy and Weirdness in the New Polish Literature* dedicated to the works of Schulz and Gombrowicz²⁴².

National-radical criticism

But Gombrowicz and Schulz were compared not only by critics enthusiastic about their work. Literary critics associated with the national movement were also eager to compare them and attack as representatives of the so-called young literature. Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote in the national-radical “Prosto z Mostu” (February 10, 1935) about poverty of thought and ideas, the social harmfulness and anti-Polish character of such works: “You will need the devil to find something Polish in the books by Choromański, Gombrowicz, Rudnicki, Schultz and Uniłowski”. The Polishness of their works probably lies only in the fact that they are written in Polish, not always in a grammatically correct language, not to mention its spiritual purity”²⁴³. Gombrowicz reacted to these accusations by sending his response to the weekly’s editorial office, which was published on March 3, 1935²⁴⁴. He noticed that it was quite risky to include the forty-year-old Schulz among young artists, and that for his own artistic development,

²³⁹ W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

²⁴⁰ See A. Sandauer, *Szkoła mitologów. Bruno Schulz i Witold Gombrowicz*, “Pion”, 6 lutego 1938, no. 5 (226), p. 4. On the day the article was published, Schulz wrote to Romana Halpern: “‘Pion’ has published an article by Sandauer as a review [...]” and a dozen or so days later he emphasized that there was “a beautiful article about me (mainly) and Gombrowicz” – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, 197 i 199, p. 164 and 166.

²⁴¹ H. Vogler, *Dwa światy romantyczne. O Brunonie Schulzu i Witoldzie Gombrowiczu*, “Skamander”, październik–grudzień 1938, z. 99/101, p. 246. See also: H. Vogler, *Świat rozszczętkowany*, “Nowy Dziennik”, 27 listopada 1937, no. 326, p. 8.

²⁴² *Z teatru, literatury i sztuki*, “Nowy Dziennik”, 20 stycznia 1938, no. 20, p. 15.

²⁴³ J. Andrzejewski, *Młoda literatura oskarżona*, “Prosto z Mostu”, 10 lutego 1935, no. 6, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ See W. Gombrowicz, *Atmosfera i kot. (W odpowiedzi p. J. Andrzejewskiemu)*, “Prosto z Mostu”, 3 marca 1935, no. 9, p. 4.

the cat incident and friendship with Kowalski were more important than the war. He expressed his respect for national values²⁴⁵, but he questioned the necessity of national culture to remain the only kind of creative work. He called the categorical assessment of young literature completely accidental and baseless: “Let us imagine that Schulz, Rudnicki and me were run over by a tram while traveling in Aleje Ujazdowskie. Only Choromański and Uniłowski would remain, the percentage of disease in young literature would decrease significantly, and then, with equal ease and eloquence, Mr. Andrzejewski could write an article showing how the post-war atmosphere had a positive impact on artistic creativity”²⁴⁶.

Ignacy Fik and “Literatura choromaniaków”

At the same time, on February 23, 1935, “Tygodnik Artistów” also published an article by Ignacy Fik “Literatura choromaniaków”²⁴⁷, in which both Gombrowicz and Schulz²⁴⁸ were included in the mainstream of pathological-manic literature (Fik uses such phrases as: chatter, delirium, dull bureaucracy, disgusting exhibitionism, anti-social literature, psychological reportage mania) that is created by “homosexuals, exhibitionists and psychopaths, degenerates, drug addicts, people with chronic stomach diseases, permanently living in hospitals, people who cannot distinguish between reality and sleep, hypochondriacs, neurasthenics, misanthropes”²⁴⁹, and also fanatics, psychic reporters and hacks. Fik wrote the following about Schulz, specifically: “The air and people of his book smell of the madness of a man’s brain overwhelmed with a disease, addicted to dreams”; and this is what he wrote about Gombrowicz: “Gombrowicz’s columns are often just the compromising deliriums of an idiot”²⁵⁰. These and other aggressive attacks on avant-garde work may have brought Schulz and Gombrowicz closer together than Sandauer’s enthusiastic comparisons. In this case, Gombrowicz again took up the defence and said directly: “We are not sick and we are not maniacs”. He also ridiculed the author’s attempt to put so many different artists into one category called “disease”. In Gombrowicz’s view, maniacal and aggressive attacks on artists looking for a new path were, in fact, symptoms of a disorder: “Columnists would like to deal with people too easily, too cheaply handle people of hard work,

245 Perhaps he needed his answer to be published in the weekly, or perhaps he did not want to be beaten by ONR’s militants. He mentioned this fear in a conversation with Dominik de Roux.

246 W. Gombrowicz, *Atmosfera i kot. (W odpowiedzi p. J. Andrzejewski)*, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 150.

247 See I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1–2.

248 Additionally: Witkiewicz, Kaden-Bandrowski, Choromański, Krzywicka, Rudnicki, Ważyk, Uniłowski.

249 I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1.

250 *Ibidem*, p. 2.

of low income and of a different spiritual structure. This is by no means healthy. On the contrary, it is pure morbidity”²⁵¹.

Superficial similarities

Articles by Sandauer and Vogler, and probably also by Andrzejewski and Fik, and by Maria Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska²⁵², had a great impact on linking the work and artistic biographies of Schulz and Gombrowicz, but their correspondence in “Studio” and Schulz’s reading about *Ferdydurke* in the headquarters of the trade union were of huge importance, too. The writers themselves worked to make the public and critics associate their names with each other. Works comparing their work are still being written to this day. According to Jerzy Jarzębski, however, the literary similarities between the prose of Schulz and Gombrowicz are superficial: “In the former’s, the ontology of literary reality assumes the interchangeability of shapes-masks, strictly subordinated to “mythological syntax”, which is ruled by an exemplary order; in the latter’s, metamorphoses are a surprise not only for the characters, but also for the narrator – and the author; reality escapes the creator’s control”²⁵³. What unites them, according to Vogler, is a single moment in which “both approach life not through the wide-open gate of naturalistic epic observation, but through the backdoor of lyricism, through a side door hidden deep from the eyes of sober, normal observers in the thicket of enchanted flowers [...]. But immediately after crossing this mysterious passage, Schulz’s and Gombrowicz’s paths go their separate ways”²⁵⁴. Differences between artistic inclinations of both writers revealed themselves most vividly during their open correspondence in the monthly “Studio” – despite a stormy exchange of thoughts, concepts and blows, no agreement was reached between them. Gombrowicz and Schulz actually spoke different languages. Aleksander Fiut writes that this duel could not have succeeded: “Both fencers fight with various arms and were taught fencing in other schools”²⁵⁵.

251 W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 193.

252 Maria Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska is the author of a story that is a pastiche of the work of, among others, Schulz and Gombrowicz, which was published on December 19, 1937, in “Apel”, a supplement to “Kurier Poranny” – see M. Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska, *Psychostenik. Gombrowiczowi, Karpińskiemu i Schulzowi*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016; as well as P. Sitkiewicz, *À la manière de Bruno Schulz. Pastisz parodia i naśladowanie Brunona Schulza w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016, p. 124–125.

253 J. Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, p. 208.

254 H. Vogler, *Dwa światy romantyczne. O Brunonie Schulzu i Witoldzie Gombrowiczu*, “Skamander”, październik–grudzień 1938, z. 99/101, p. 246.

255 A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorową z Wilczej*, p. 158.

1939: Transatlantic to Argentina

Gombrowicz and Schulz both tried to publish their books abroad. In the spring of 1939, they met the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, but the meeting did not bring the expected results²⁵⁶. Gombrowicz was already thinking about leaving Poland. In July 1939, he received a tourist visa and permission from the military authorities to go abroad. On July 28, he left Warsaw, and a day later he sailed from Gdynia to the port of Buenos Aires, where he arrived on August 20, 1939²⁵⁷. Once there, he had to face a new, difficult reality and numerous problems in the life of a lonely emigrant.

1941–1945: Concern for the fate of a friend

It is unknown whether Gombrowicz wrote any letters to Bruno Schulz after reaching Argentina. He probably had no contact with him since the outbreak of the war. He was tormented by uncertainty about his friend's fate, and he asked others if they knew anything. In June 1941, he wrote to Julian Tuwim: "Don't you know what is happening to B. Schulz?"²⁵⁸. On October 15, 1941, he wrote a dramatic letter to Józef Wittlin, in which he complained about his hopeless situation and asked for help. When writing about his problems, he did not forget about Schulz²⁵⁹.

Wittlin tried to help Gombrowicz, but he had no information whatsoever. On December 16, 1941, Gombrowicz sent him another letter in which he informed: "I am extremely concerned about the fate of Bruno Schulz, with whom I was a great friend"²⁶⁰. It is unknown when and from whom he learned about the death of Schulz, who was murdered on November 19, 1942. He certainly knew this already in January 1945, when he wrote a letter to Adam Mauersberg: "Write to me about your fate and the fate of your friends. How did Bruno die?"²⁶¹. Mauersberg, their mutual friend, did not know the answer to this question. Two years later, Gombrowicz repeated his request: "I would like to know more about the circumstances of poor Bruno's death"²⁶². In response to these questions,

256 Italian publishing houses which Schulz approached already in 1937 were not interested in publishing his works – see J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 82 and 499.

257 See K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 355.

258 Quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 407.

259 W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę. Korespondencja, część pierwsza. Witold Gombrowicz. Józef Wittlin. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Artur Sandauer*, układ, przedmowy, przypisy J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1996, p. 7.

260 *Ibidem*, p. 8.

261 *Idem*, *Listy do Adama Mauersberga*, Łódź 1988, letter no. 1.

262 *Ibidem*, letter no. 2.

he received false information from someone that Schulz had died in a German concentration camp.

1955–1960: “Bruno? Write about him? No”.

After the war, Gombrowicz often recalled his friendship with Bruno Schulz – in conversations with friends²⁶³, in private letters to family and friends, as well as in the memoirs he prepared for publication. Most often, these are short mentions, reminiscences of the old friendship. In 1955, he wrote in *Dziennik*: “Bruno Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles*, a thing of a different kind, of high rank”²⁶⁴. In 1956, he received an article from Sandauer about Schulz’s work titled “Rzeczywistość zdegradowana” [Degraded Reality]. On September 7, 1956, Gombrowicz wrote back that he thanked and paid tribute to such an in-depth and extensive text “about poor Bruno, with whom, as you know, I enjoyed a friendship”²⁶⁵. Gombrowicz also emphasizes that Schulz himself and his work are a topic that could be talked about a lot. Despite this declaration, at that time he had no need to write longer texts about his old friend. In correspondence from September 19, 1956, in response to a question from his older brother for a text about Schulz replied: “Bruno? Write about him? No”²⁶⁶. In 1957, *Ferdydurke* was published again in Poland, which was widely commented on in the national press. Gombrowicz discussed the matter, too, in *Dziennik*: “They didn’t understand exactly everything about me [...] I’m resigned”²⁶⁷. This feeling of resignation made Gombrowicz come back to the classic text that most accurately permeated his work and the mechanisms that govern it. Contemporary critics did not notice the full depth of meaning of the novel, but “Bruno Schulz saw it in his study about *Ferdydure*, printed in the pre-war ‘Skamander’”²⁶⁸. His insight was so penetrating, Gombrowicz recalled, that through *Ferdydurke* Schulz reached the “most important” issue in it, and at the same time touched his subsequent works – as if Schulz’s text was a prophetic discussion of Gombrowicz’s entire oeuvre. In 1960, still in his *Diary*, he wrote: “I owe a lot to several writers who supported me, starting with the outstanding Bruno Schulz”²⁶⁹. Was this “today” related to the first translations of Schulz’s single stories into English and French?

263 See R. Pla, “Wywiad przeprowadzony w listopadzie 1978 w Buenos Aires”, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie. Świadectwa i dokumenty 1939–1969*, przekł. Z. Chądzyńska, A. Husarska, Kraków 2005, p. 44.

264 W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 257.

265 Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 179.

266 Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 62.

267 Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 339.

268 Ibidem, p. 342–343.

269 Ibidem, p. 584.

Or maybe with the publishing house's plans of René Julliard, who was soon to present Schulz's work to French-speaking readers?

1961: Could Gombrowicz be jealous of Schulz?

The year 1961 turned out to be a breakthrough for Gombrowicz's memories about Schulz. It was then, in July 1961, that the first comprehensive collection of Schulz's stories in French was published under the title *Traité des mannequins*²⁷⁰, which was a selection of stories from *Sklepy cynamonowe* and *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą*. On July 3, 1961, Gombrowicz informed his brother: "Schulz's *Sklepy cynamonowe* [...] was published in Paris. I won't be surprised if Bruno now climbs to the highest rungs of world literature because his is an excellent art, though too Kafkaesque for my taste²⁷¹. In a letter of July 17, 1961, he wrote to Artur Sandauer that he had predicted this book would be a great success because it was "literature for writers, poetry for poets"²⁷². Another time, on August 7, 1961, he wondered: "I am very curious about what will happen next in other countries with this truly great prose"²⁷³. It seems, therefore, that Gombrowicz looked at the French edition of Schulz's works with curiosity and optimism. However, Maurice Nadeau, responsible for publishing *Traité des mannequins*, claimed that Gombrowicz was an egocentric who could not come to terms with the idea that his publisher had to deal with other writers as well: "He did not accept it with great joy that, for example, I was interested in Bruno Schulz"²⁷⁴. Indeed, something strange happened shortly after the publication of Schulz's works. Gombrowicz resented Sandauer for avoiding conversations with him about Schulz, and for making the publication of his works in French, together with Nadeau, a secret: "Why exactly are you avoiding one subject with me? S... S... Sch... Sch... Schulz...? Do you perhaps think you cheated on me with him? Do you think I am jealous? Do you accuse me of persecuting him?!"²⁷⁵. In a letter from October 6, 1961, Gombrowicz explained: "This dunce, Sandauer, apparently avoids writing to me about Bruno, as if he were ashamed or afraid, or maybe thought that I am jealous – I wrote a few words for him to listen to"²⁷⁶. Could Gombrowicz be jealous of Schulz? He seems to have reacted with

270 B. Schulz, *Traité des mannequins*, traduit du polonais par S. Arlet, A. Kosko, G. Lisowski, G. Sidre, préface d'A. Sandauer, Paris 1961.

271 W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 273.

272 See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 247.

273 Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 279.

274 M. Nadeau, "Wspomnienie spisane w Paryżu 17 czerwca 1986", in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 99.

275 See W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 248.

276 Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 283.

counterarguments to every idolatrous mention Sandauer made of Schulz's work, for example raising the issue of the excessive "Kafkesque-ness" of Schulz's prose. It was Gombrowicz style to have a different opinion, to provoke and to stand your ground. He also explained this to some extent: "And the fact that I am not that much of an admirer of his art as you are... well, what's the big deal?"²⁷⁷. Indeed, Gombrowicz repeatedly emphasized his appreciation of Schulz's work, but almost always pointed out its shortcomings, too – for example in a letter to Józef Wittlin of June 25, 1952: "Bruno is a wonderful talent. Some of his things are dazzling (but he couldn't combine poetry with prose, he couldn't unite these two aspects of the world – which is extremely important to me"²⁷⁸, or to Sandauer himself: "I also admire him as an artist, some of his works are brilliant – only his placement in actuality does not seem fertile enough to me"²⁷⁹. Gombrowicz appreciated Schulz's prose, but he did not worship it – could this have been the cause of the conflict?

Perhaps Sandauer and Nadeau were afraid of the hot-tempered writer who fought for his fame at every turn. Otto Mertens, Gombrowicz's doctor, recalled that the author of *Ferdydurke* was amazed to see illustrations for Schulz's stories on the walls of his house. It turned out that Mertens was fascinated by *The Street of Crocodiles* so much so that he commissioned artist friends to make paintings inspired by "The Tailor's Dummies". "When Gombrowicz saw them, he didn't like them very much. He also didn't like the fact that I was a Schulz enthusiast and didn't know Gombrowicz yet!"²⁸⁰. But in the case of translating Schulz's stories into French, there could be no competition. Gombrowicz himself stated that Schulz's greatness worked to his advantage²⁸¹. It is also untrue that the French edition of Schulz's stories was kept secret. Sandauer informed Gombrowicz about this in at least four letters: July 14 and 20, 1959, March 5, 1960 and May 26, 1960²⁸². He himself wrote in *Dziennik* that he had known about this edition for a long time²⁸³. The book was supposed to be published a year earlier, but the publishing house had problems with obtaining the copyright from Ella Schulz-Podstolska²⁸⁴. The cause of the conflict must have been different.

277 See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 249.

278 Ibidem, p. 46.

279 Ibidem, p. 247.

280 O. Mertens, "Wypowiedź spisana w Berlinie 24 października 1984", in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 252.

281 "Not only does Bruno's greatness not bother me, but from a personal point of view, it may be useful in France, because it also draws attention to me" – W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 248.

282 For all listed letters, see W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*.

283 "I have known about this edition for a long time, and have been preparing it with the sweat of my brow" – W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik...*, p. 654.

284 See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 240.

On July 17, 1961, Gombrowicz sent a long letter to Sandauer, almost entirely devoted to Schulz. He declared that he had already received *Traité des mannequins*, praised the introduction by Sandauer, called the translation very good and announced his willingness to write a longer text about Schulz for *Dziennik*. He opened up, declaring that when he saw the French edition of his friend's works, he was moved: "This book brings back many memories for me. Did you know that I was a good friend of his and that he fought a heroic battle for *Ferdydurke*?"²⁸⁵. He also honestly assessed Schulz's work: "As for his art, I have never been a 100% reader of it – I always thought it was too narrow and too arbitrary, also detached, not closely related to reality [...] For me, Bruno was too much of a poet, too much of an artist. (He had a feeling of the insignificance of art, but he knew nothing to oppose it.) And yet too close to Kafka. There is much to say about the matter"²⁸⁶. The letter clearly shows that everything related to Schulz was extremely important to Gombrowicz – because of his art, shared friendship and memories. Sandauer ignored this personal tone. This seems to have enraged Gombrowicz, who hoped that he would also reach Schulz through their mutual friend, who was an admirer of his work. Therefore, there is no indication that Gombrowicz was really jealous of Schulz. On the contrary, he never expressed any envy.

1961: Schulz in France – "We are a couple again"

Schulz's entry into the French publishing market was for Gombrowicz like the return of a long-forgotten friend who has finally entered the wide waters of world literature. "There is something strange and perhaps even slightly touching to me in the fact that we are a couple again – this time in the wide world"²⁸⁷. For Gombrowicz, it was a moving experience, which he mentioned several times in his correspondence from that period. On July 3, 1961, he wrote: "This meeting with him after so many years at Julliard moved me quite a bit, I was close to him and he was the first to make a fuss about *Ferdydurke*"²⁸⁸. He used a similar tone in a letter of August 1, 1961 to Maurice Nadeau himself. He wrote about *Traité des mannequins*, claiming that Sandauer's analysis was great, Nadeau's introduction seemed "electrifying", and the entire publication would, in his opinion, be a great success²⁸⁹.

285 See *ibidem*, p. 246.

286 See *ibidem*, p. 240.

287 *Ibidem*, p. 247.

288 *Idem*, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 273.

289 Gombrowicz would later repeat more or less the same theses in *Fragment z dziennika*.

He also admitted his emotion again: “I am excited by the fact that I am meeting him again after twenty years, this time through your publishing series”²⁹⁰. Inspired by the French edition of Schulz’s stories, Gombrowicz decided to write a longer memoir. On August 7, 1961, he finished writing “Fragment z dziennika” [Fragment from a diary] dedicated to Schulz. The text was published in November 1961 in the Paris monthly “Kultura”²⁹¹.

Gombrowicz’s account from that text is, above all, a literary creation. Aleksander Fiut will even call it fabrication and mystification²⁹². Gombrowicz himself admitted: “I will probably write about Bruno in a somewhat shocking way, because I do not want to fall into the convention of these ‘memoirs’”²⁹³. So, based partly on facts from their shared biographies, he created an image of a one-sided friendship that was maintained by Schulz himself and in which he never repaid him in any way. There is no longer any talk of a “great friendship” or “poor Bruno” or a “great late friend” about whom Gombrowicz asked with concern, and then mentioned him in his letters. In this case, Gombrowicz dazzled with the image of Schulz’s outstretched hand that falls into the void – and in his opinion this was an extremely Schulzian predicament. “I did not return these feelings to him, I gave him terribly little of myself, almost nothing”²⁹⁴ – these words alone show what Gombrowicz was striving for. To destroy the form of the parable of the dead friend that everyone would probably expect. “A provocation then? Surely. But what is it aimed at? First of all, at genre norms that control the recipient’s expectations”²⁹⁵. That is why Gombrowicz chose to highlight the “weirdness” of their relationship. That is why he wrote that he did not trust Schulz or his art and that he never read his stories honestly because they bored him. He listed an entire catalogue of what made them different: in physical, racial, class, spiritual, artistic terms – and came to the inevitable, but absurd, conclusion that “if there was anyone in Polish art who was 100% opposed to me, it was him”²⁹⁶.

1969–2021

Gombrowicz died on July 24, 1969 in Vence, France. An entry in *The Diary* was the last text he devoted to Schulz. However, in 1977, the Paris Literary Institute published *Wspomnienia polskie*, found a year earlier by the deceased writer’s wife, Rita Gombrowicz. This is a series of columns written between November 1959 and October in 1961. In one

290 Idem, letter to Maurice Nadeau of August 1, 1961, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 112.

291 See W. Gombrowicz, *Fragment z dziennika*, “Kultura”, listopad 1961, no. 11 (169), p. 16–26.

292 A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowq z Wilczej*, p. 157.

293 W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 247.

294 Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

295 A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowq z Wilczej*, p. 157.

296 W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 658.

of them, from February 1961, Gombrowicz described in detail his acquaintance with Schulz. This is one of the important testimonies of their parallel biographies, subject to much less literary mystification than “Fragment z dziennika”, which was published several months later.

Since then, several dozen biographical articles and pieces of literary criticism have been written comparing the prose of Gombrowicz and Schulz. These include texts by Artur Sandauer²⁹⁷, Jerzy Jarzębski²⁹⁸, Włodzimierz Bolecki²⁹⁹ and many young researchers. The number of such works is constantly growing.

297 A. Sandauer, *Schulz i Gombrowicz, czyli literatura głębin. (Próba psychoanalizy)*, “Kultura” 1976, no. 44, p. 5; no. 45, p. 4.

298 J. Jarzębski, *Awangarda wobec historii: Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz*, “Odra” 1987, no. 11, p. 23–30; idem, “Między awangardą a modernizmem: Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz”, in: idem, *W Polsce, czyli wszędzie. Szkice o polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warszawa 1992, p. 7–18; idem, *Bóg ateistów: Schulz, Gombrowicz, Lem*, “Znak” 1997, no. 2, p. 17–33.

299 W. Bolecki, *Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz*, “Dialog” 1995, no. 10, p. 88–99.

Katarzyna Warska: Childhood in the Biography of a Writer. The Case of Bruno Schulz

The traditional model of a comprehensive biography of a writer assumes that the author will attempt to tell story of the life of the “protagonist” from birth to death – usually through a reconstruction of family history, and sometimes also with the posthumous history of the body, or with some detail on acts of remembrance¹. In this model, the biographer tries to reveal to the reader all phases of the protagonist’s life. The selective model, in turn, represented by all kinds of thematic biographies, provides a selection of events concentrating on a particular aspect of human existence, or focuses on a given phase of the protagonist’s life. Both models may present a chronological variant or a different order of presentation of events, for example from the perspective of a key moment in life that is told at the beginning, or in a thematic order, organising facts by places or people, for example.

Books such as *Regiony wielkiej herezji* [Regions of Great Heresy] by Jerzy Ficowski, *Schulz pod kluczem* [Schulz under Lock and Key] by Wiesław Budzyński, *Bruno. Epoka genialna* [Bruno. Age of a Genius] by Anna Kaszuba-Dębska, and two texts by Jerzy Jarzębski (that in some sense also belonging to the biographical genre) – *Schulz*, a part of the series “A to Polska właśnie” [“And Here You See Poland”], and the preface to a publication in the “Biblioteka Narodowa” [“National Library”] series – are intended to be comprehensive². Their goal is to cover everything that was known at that point (Ficowski, Jarzębski, Kaszuba-Dębska) or to supplement what was already known with newly established facts (Budzyński), which came from all stages and areas of life, and therefore were not subject to thematic selection. Jarzębski explains how difficult the task was: “Bruno Schulz was not the type of writer who could easily become a subject of

1 The continuity between biography and necrography is confirmed by the words of Janusz Sławiński: “The death of an outstanding person (we know this from Gundolf) is by no means the end of his biography”, (J. Sławiński, *Czas wspomnień*, in: *Wspomnienia o Julianie Przybosiu*, ed. and prefaced by J. Sławiński, Warszawa 1976, p. 7).

2 See J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, Sejny 2002; W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, Warszawa 2001; A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, Kraków 2020; J. Jarzębski, *Wstęp*, in: B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, ed. J. Jarzębski, second edition revised and supplemented, Wrocław 1998 (BN I 264); idem, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999.

a biography based on the ‘life and work’ model. What we know about his life does not lend itself to a romantic plot. [...] The biography of Schulz is truly not a topic for a longer narrative”³. Therefore, Jarzębski appreciates Ficowski’s efforts: “For a reader born near the end of this century, it is sometimes difficult to understand why the biography of Schulz required such painstaking reconstruction, to which Jerzy Ficowski, a pre-eminent expert on Schulz’s issues, devoted his life. In fact, these studies were so difficult because the writer’s natural environment, i.e. the environment of Galician Jews, was almost entirely wiped out by the war”⁴.

At first glance, the selective biography model seems less challenging. However, this is contradicted by two thematic biographies of Andrzejewski written by Anna Synoradzka-Demadre: *Andrzejewski* and *Jerzy Andrzejewski. Przyczynek do biografii prywatnej* [Jerzy Andrzejewski. A Contribution to a Private Biography]⁵. They can hardly be called modest, and undoubtedly titanic effort was put into them. Kaszuba-Dębska started from the selective model, and first published *Kobiety i Schulz* [Women and Schulz]⁶. This *her-story* is also largely about Schulz, but his life is presented from the perspective of his relationships with women (which Jarzębski had previously dealt with in a chapter on “Women” in his popular *Schulz*). A similar path was taken by Klementyna Suchanow, who first wrote *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* [The Argentine Adventures of Gombrowicz], and then a comprehensive biography entitled *Gombrowicz. Ja, geniusz* [Gombrowicz. I, Genius]⁷. At the same time, Budzyński moved from the general to the specific. His *Uczniowie Schulza* [Schulz’s Students], in which he looks at the writer’s fate through the prism of the accounts of his former pupils, could belong to the selective model. Incidentally, like Kaszuba-Dębska, Budzyński tells a different story – of the students who are his interlocutors, and of other inhabitants of Drohobych who are in one way or another woven into the extensive network of relations with Schulz⁸. Budzyński moves even further away from Schulz in his earlier work *Miasto Schulza* [Schulz’s Town]⁹.

³ J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 6.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 39.

⁵ A. Synoradzka-Demadre, *Andrzejewski*, Kraków 1997; eadem, *Jerzy Andrzejewski. Przyczynek do biografii prywatnej*, Warszawa 2016.

⁶ A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, Gdańsk 2016.

⁷ K. Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, Kraków 2005; eadem, *Gombrowicz. Ja, Geniusz*, vol. 1, Wołowiec 2017.

⁸ W. Budzyński, *Uczniowie Schulza*, Warszawa 2011.

⁹ Idem, *Miasto Schulza*, Warszawa 2005.

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Regardless of the choice of a model for the biography of Schulz, there are basically two motivations behind the attempt to write it. The first one is to show a “truth” about the protagonist, his life and his environment. The existence of this motivation is confirmed by numerous self-referential fragments in biographies. For example, Kaszuba-Dębska in the preface to *Bruno. Epoka genialna* declares: “Let me present the biography of Bruno Schulz: an outstanding artist, guiding me on my creative path from an early age, and in a way still influencing my perception of reality with words and imagination. My intention is to tell, to the extent allowed by the current sources, the true story”¹⁰.

In the era of postmodernity, we know perfectly well that this goal, defined as capturing the essence of what actually happened in the past, is completely unattainable. There is a whole list of reasons for such a state of interpretive affairs, but I will limit myself to three areas here that are important for the humanities. (1) We know that representation itself is contaminated with powerlessness. It does not refer to anything outside itself, and by its very nature it assumes the absence of what it is supposed to represent¹¹. (2) No objective vision of history is cognitively available, which results from the nature of the past being only a construct (history is written by the victors; and it consists of facts, not events, etc.)¹². All that remains after the protagonist of the biography is branded with creation, chance, and the impermanence of memory. (3) A biographer is so entangled in language that the biography hardly differs from a novel. That is why White wrote: “[History] is always written as part of a contest between contending poetic figurations of what the past *might* consist of”¹³. A reference to poetry would be perhaps even more appropriate than a reference to the novel because a biographer uses words to construct their own version of the story about the protagonist, writing as much about the originally intended subject, as about themselves – since it is impossible to avoid elements of autobiography in a biography. Stanisław Rosiek describes it as a banal truth (writing this time not about the study of Schulz, but of Mickiewicz) “that studying someone’s

10 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, Kraków 2020, p. 9. In an interview conducted by Polina Justova, Kaszuba-Dębska explains the reasons why she decided to write a biography: “But above all, I lacked a comprehensive biography the dominant feature of which would be the truth, perhaps painful, but the truth, not a mythical poetic story” ([https:// culture.pl/pl/artykul/anna-kaszuba-debska-schulz-czytany-na-nowo-wywiad-0](https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/anna-kaszuba-debska-schulz-czytany-na-nowo-wywiad-0); retrieved: 24 January 2021).

11 See M. P. Markowski, *Pragnienie obecności. Filozofie reprezentacji od Platona do Kartezjusza*, Gdańsk 1999; idem, *O reprezentacji*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy badawcze*, eds. M. P. Markowski, R. Nycz, second edition, Kraków 2012, p. 287–333.

12 See H. White, “The Historical Event”, in: *differences* (2008) 19 (2): 9–34.

13 H. White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press 1978, p. 98.

biography – especially a great biography – is rarely impartial, that a biographer brings in themselves, their horizons, and their morals. And this becomes a basis for the creation of an image of the protagonist¹⁴. There is no biography that would not manifest features of another genre, or would not bear the marks of a related literary convention. This is perhaps why White – developing Northrop Frye’s model – determined four narrative patterns of historical writing: Tragedy, Comedy, Satire, and Romance¹⁵. When Schulzologists analyse the biography of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops*, they are looking for more detailed answers. For example, Jakub Orzeszek notices in Ficowski’s works the effect of mourning after the deceased Schulz¹⁶. Researched in this way, *Regiony wielkiej herezji* is as much a biography as an elegy. Jerzy Kandziora remembers – in the context of Ficowski – to “recall the tradition of great realist novel, of which the author of *Regiony wielkiej herezji* was an admirer”¹⁷. Marcin Romanowski, on the other hand, considers Budzyński’s *Schulz pod kluczem* as a reportage biography that puts memory above history¹⁸.

However, it seems that there is some – if only a very thin – thread connecting “real” events with the biographer’s story – even though it is only their good will. Philippe Lejeune assures: “Without a doubt, the truth is unattainable, especially when it concerns human life, but the desire to acquire it determines the field of discourse and cognitive acts, a certain type of human relations, by no means illusory ones”¹⁹. Therefore, a biographer’s role is to fulfil the need, expressed by Paul Ricœur, to present a narrative. Even though the truth still eludes the narrator, an ethically non-indifferent narrative remains an important tool (or rather act) that could help us get to know our different selves and the selves of another person – the oneself as another²⁰. Hanna Kirchner, for example, tries to follow this non-essential path: “Does this distance allow me to reach the ‘real’ Nałkowska, stripped of masks and costumes, stripped of the veils of self-delusion? The assumption is incorrect. The writer’s life course and the record of her inner experience confirm the knowledge about human that she developed in her work, and it also applies to this her. This is what I am trying to make visible in this

14 S. Rosiek, *Mickiewicz (po śmierci). Studia i szkice nekrograficzne*, Gdańsk 2013, p. 10.

15 H. White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press 1978, p. 81–100.

16 J. Orzeszek, *Schulz i żałoba. O drugim ciele pisarza*, “Schulz/Forum” no. 14, 2019, p. 168–185.

17 J. Kandziora, *Jerzy Ficowski o Schulzu – między rekonstrukcją a retoryką. (Refleksje nad “Regionami wielkiej herezji”)*, “Schulz/Forum” no. 3, 2013, p. 58.

18 M. Romanowski, *Biografia reportażowa w epoce upamiętnienia. O “Schulzu pod kluczem” Wiesława Budzyńskiego*, “Jednak Książki. Gdańskie czasopismo humanistyczne” 2016, no. 5, p. 42.

19 P. Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact”, translated by K. Leary, in: *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis 1989, p. 3.

20 P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London 1992, esp. “Sixth Study. The Self and Narrative Identity”.

book – that a human is ‘real’ in all their even most contradictory elements. It is not without reason that Günter Grass used the metaphor of peeling an onion in his autobiography. For it is only a unity of layers, down to the last scale”²¹.

Let us therefore assume that value lies in the very attempt to reach the truth, and also – thus agreeing with Frank Ankersmit – that, after all, there were some events that, despite the knowledge of the inevitability of one’s defeat, the scholar of the past and the author of a biography, constantly and persistently strives to learn about²². Thus, what really happened cannot be called “the truth” in a biography. It will be the truth of the image, as in Ankersmit’s metaphor, in which the historian is an artist who renders the general atmosphere of the scene²³.

Adopting even a weak, Ankersmitian definition of truth does not seem to release the biographer from certain obligations towards the protagonist, or at least – as I stated above – the biographers themselves can feel this burden on their shoulders. Representation, even if it substitutes for the original, strives to match it²⁴. The decisions of a biographer regarding the selection of material and the methods of its presentation are not without moral consequences. As Ricœur aphoristically put it, there is “no ethically neutral narrative”²⁵. In the case of biographies, ethical complications have an additional dimension. A biographer signs a moral pact – let us call it, in accordance with standard parlance, a “biographical pact” that protects the reader who believes in the story and accepts the rules imposed by the author and the text. Without this agreement, the recipient would be doomed to fail from the start²⁶.

■

We have analysed the qualitative aspect of the relationship between life and biography, so we can now discuss the quantitative relationship. Birth and death mark the beginning and end of the timeline on which one can mark a countable and tangible number of points (events) and ranges (periods, phases of life). By virtue of the obligation to the protagonist and the reader, the events marked on this axis appeal to the biographer in an indefinite way to be represented in the story. What happened should simply be told. The plan of the story and the plan

21 H. Kirchner, *Nalkowska albo życie pisane*, second edition, Warszawa 2011, p. 9. Underlined – HK

22 See F. Ankersmit, “Six These on Narrativist Philosophy of History”, in: *History and Topology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1994.

23 F. Ankersmit, “The Linguistic Turn: Literary Theory and Historical Theory”, in: *Historical Representation*, p. 29–74.

24 See F. Ankersmit, “In Praise of Subjectivity”, in: *Historical Representation* 2001, no. 2 (3), p. 21.

25 P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London 1992, p. 115.

26 The term “biographical pact”, often used in biographical research, was, of course, coined as an analogy to Philippe Lejeune’s “autobiographical pact”.

of the life should coincide. Naturally, this obligation cannot be fulfilled either – it is technically impossible, but also strategically unnecessary. Not everything is of interest to us (biographers and readers). In this sense, any comprehensive biography has a selective dimension, is a part, a fragment, an episode. Michał Paweł Markowski wrote on this subject for “Tygodnik Powszechny”: “As a narrative about life, biography is an art of exclusion, choice, and omission”²⁷.

A biographer deliberately focuses the reader’s attention on various events. First, they select the ones they intend to recount, and then arrange the events in the appropriate order in the course of the narrative. For example, Kaszuba-Dębska starts *Bruno. Epoka genialna* with an attempt to reconstruct Schulz’s departure to Paris. Budzyński returns to Schulz’s death, and Jarzębski to his birth²⁸. The biographer describes in detail only those events that they find special for some reason. This was already desired by the American historian Paul Murray Kendall, whose words are reported by Anita Całek as follows: “The author [of a biography] should allocate more space to specific events, depending not on the amount of material they have but on the importance of a specific fact in the life of the portrayed character”²⁹.

When selecting important events, the author can follow intuition, believe the confession of the protagonist who considered an event important for their life, or rely on a tradition in research on a given protagonist, as well as follow the hierarchy of their times and/or the current conventions for writing biographies. Sylwia Chwedorczyk follows the contemporary, ethically motivated need to reveal the previously tabooed homosexual relationship between Anna Kowalska and Maria Dąbrowska (which, incidentally, recreates Dąbrowska’s domination over Kowalska in the narrative of her biography; fortunately, she looks at the poet’s life through the prism of another woman, but if she were to publish the book as a biography devoted to a woman’s relationship with a more influential man, she would probably be exposed to liberal criticism)³⁰. Artur Domosławski was sued by Ryszard Kapuściński’s heirs after he had presented events from the reporter’s life, posing questions about the boundaries between private and public, ethical and unethical (which, by the way, probably turned out to be the founding act of modern Polish biography studies)³¹. The biographer’s motivations may be completely individual, as it was in the case of Synoradzka who included a chapter

27 M. P. Markowski, *Cień biografą. Życie odkrywane*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 2010, no. 17, sup., online: <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/cien-biografy-145068> (retrieved: 24 January 2021).

28 W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, chapters “Krwawy czwartek” and “Zawiadowca gabinetu ry-sunkowego”; J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 7 and 28.

29 A. Całek, *Biografia naukowa: od koncepcji do narracji. Interdyscyplinarność, teorie, metody badaw-cze*, Kraków 2013, p. 30.

30 S. Chwedorczyk, *Kowalska. Ta od Dąbrowskiej*, Warszawa 2020.

31 A. Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warszawa 2010.

in Andrzejewski's private biography which broke down its structure, in order to correct her mistake from the previous book³². Traditionally, in biographies of Schulz, his death seems to play the most important role: it is a foundational event for *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, a point of departure in *Schulz pod kluczem*, an object of continuous rewriting in *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, an explanation to the preface to the edition in "Biblioteka Narodowa", and perhaps only in the series "A to Polska właśnie" Schulz's death is treated as any other event – and in a manner consistent with the popular science convention of the series which presents rather plain biographies of writers.

Despite Kendall's advice, biographers, proud of their discoveries, often stretch and fill certain parts of the story material with further detail when they have managed to gather a lot of information on a given topic. At that moment, an event is given extra value, and then becomes even deeply entrenched in tradition, though as if by accident. In the case of Schulz, the relationships with people whose letters survived the war are well described: with Debora Vogel, Józefina Szelińska, Romana Halpern, and Anna Płockier. I am not trying to undermine these person's role in Schulz's life. But what about those we know nothing about, or know very little – like the mysterious Stefania Dretler-Flin? Kaszuba-Dębska says nothing about her, but instead she cites Schulz's complaints about the unruliness of the school-age youth in Drohobych³³.

A biographer may also shorten their presentation of a topic if they consider it boring or irrelevant to the reader, or they might even omit some known events or their entire sequences in their narrative. In such a case, a biographer knows that something happened to the protagonist, but they deliberately hide it from the reader – probably in the name of the same truth for which another event is described in detail. Their choices may be individual, but certain topics are sometimes omitted or only mentioned for cultural or strictly ideological reasons, analogically to the representation and over-representation of other topics. Rosiek – drawing up the project of the calendar of Schulz's life – used the metaphor of exile: "Choice is a right (often used incorrectly) and a privilege (often overused) of a biographer, who creates discourse in accordance with their own principles, including within its framework only some of the events known to them, at the same time condemning other ones to exile: to marginalization or oblivion"³⁴. Marcin Romanowski commented on Ficowski's work: "Considering the problem of the (non-)presence of the erotic sphere in biography, we should, of course, take into account the cultural context in which the biographical narrative is written, as well as the context of the testimonies on which the biographer

32 See A. Synoradzka-Demadre, *Jerzy Andrzejewski*, p. 13.

33 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno*, p. 135–137.

34 S. Rosiek, *Biografia Schulza jako wyzwanie (rzucone historii)*, "Schulz/Forum" 6, 2015, p. 75.

bases their work. This cultural context shapes the framework for what can be said about the protagonist's sexuality. What might seem excessively restrained from our perspective in the second decade of the 21st century, was simply a matter of *decorum* at the time when *Regiony* was being written (the 1960s)³⁵. When I am reading *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, I do not have the feeling that Ficowski ignored Schulz's masochism. We simply know today that he did not write about everything the witnesses told him. And naturally, for Ficowski, Schulz's masochism was an artistic strategy rather than a biographical fact. But Schulz the masochist did share the posthumous fate of homosexual writers whose sexuality remained silent for decades.

The reason for certain events being underrepresented or omitted in a biography is often the insufficient amount of material or lack of knowledge about a given topic. In such a case, a biographer can only mention some facts or hypothesize, consciously remain silent on a topic so as not to mislead the reader, or simply might not be aware of an event at all. In the case of Schulz – as Ficowski so movingly put it – the archive is modest and poses many difficulties for biographers: “The war, the change of the country's borders, the death of most of Schulz's closest friends, the destruction of his copious correspondence, the disappearance of all his autographs and manuscripts – all this made it necessary to act almost blindly, often with detective-like or even archaeological methods. That is how exactly the time of his biography and its close witnesses was wasted”³⁶. At any rate, none of the biographers so far knew about Schulz's actual debut, which was a short story *Undula*, published under the pseudonym Marcelli Weron in the oilmen's magazine “Świt”³⁷. Kaszuba-Dębska managed to mention this fact in the preface, but only when the rest of the book was ready³⁸. Only since the digitalization of birth records, it has been known that Schulz's parents did not have just three children who lived into adulthood. Often biographers are forced to report events about which little is known – which also applies to the biographers of Schulz. Even though he studied in a boys' folk school for the first four years of his education, both Ficowski and Jarzębski write only about his middle school period. Budzyński quotes a student who mentioned that he went to the same school as Schulz. Only Kaszuba-Dębska discusses the topic of folk school, but she does not have any materials to provide further detail³⁹.

35 See M. Romanowski, *Masochizm Schulza w ujęciu Ficowskiego*, “Schulz/Forum” 7, 2016, p. 100–101.

36 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 14.

37 See Ł. Chomycz, *Wokół wystawy w Borystawiu. O dwóch debiutach Brunona Schulza*, translated by A. Pomorski, “Schulz/Forum” 14, 2019, p. 13–32.

38 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno*, p. 12–13.

39 *Ibidem*, p. 133–137. Cf. K. Warska, *1898–1902*, <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/1898-1902> (retrieved: 12 January 2020).

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“Let us take as an example a complete life-story of the kind frequently written in the nineteenth century. The fabula contains the birth of the hero, his childhood, adolescence, military service, first love, the period of social ambition, decline, and death. It is possible to determine the number of pages devoted to each episode. Often, this simple exercise alone will make clear that certain episodes are given more attention than others. Childhood, for instance, is often summarized quickly, while ‘first love’ is dwelt upon in much more detail” – this is how Mieke Bal writes about the temporal relations between the phases of the protagonist’s life in the 19th century novel⁴⁰. We can often observe a similar arrangement in biographies of writers. Childhood is subject to all the mechanisms of shortening and omission known from the novel. Anna Arno admits: “For a biographer, the first twenty years of the protagonist’s life are actually one chapter, there is a lot of speculation, the history of the city they came from, the history of the family. But the twenty years between forty and sixty, or between sixty and eighty – that is a huge work”⁴¹.

An approach to the topic of childhood in biography could be traced over time – just as Philippe Ariès did that at the general level of Western culture. There is no doubt that cultural clichés are reflected in biographies. Up to a certain point, childhood seems to be useful in a writer’s biography only when the biographer discovers some formative events in it. If the routine of an adult writer’s life is of little interest to anyone, what can one say about the everyday life of a child? Who will treat playing hide-and-seek with childhood friends as seriously as exchanging correspondence with another eminent writer? This conviction about the scarce importance of events from the first dozen or so years of life also translates into a general lack of materials for writing a biography. Not much of this period is preserved and there is little that can be reconstructed from actual sources.

However, when analysing biographies synchronously, differences can be observed depending on the biographical convention adopted by the author. Childhood is rather briefly discussed in ‘life and work’ monographs, such as the prefaces to editions in “Biblioteka Narodowa”. Michał Głowiński, in his preface to Tuwim’s *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected Poems], omits his childhood entirely⁴². Andrzej Zawada devotes six paragraphs to Iwaszkiewicz’s childhood – less than

⁴⁰ M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, third edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, p. 99.

⁴¹ *Biografia. O atrakcyjności gatunku i jego pułapkach* [Biography. Its appeal and traps], the discussion was attended by: A. Arno, A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, G. Kubica-Heller, M. Szumna, M. Urbanowski, T. Walas i M. Wyka, moderated by A. Pekaniec, “Dekada Literacka” 2018, nr 2/3 (36/37), p. 39.

⁴² M. Głowiński, *Wstęp*, in: J. Tuwim, *Wiersze wybrane*, ed. M. Głowiński, fourth edition, extended, Wrocław 1986.

three pages out of the 21 of the entire biographical segment⁴³. Three paragraphs about Leśmian's childhood can be found in the study by Jacek Trznadel⁴⁴. Ewa Wiegandtowa devotes six paragraphs on two pages to Wittlin's childhood in relation to the 42 pages of the whole work which covers both his life and work.⁴⁵ Similarly, it takes Mirosław Wójcik six paragraphs – two pages compared to the 41 pages of the story on Zegadłowicz's entire life – to talk about his childhood⁴⁶. Those six paragraphs seem to be the average volume of childhood stories in the introductions to publications in "Biblioteka Narodowa". This size is exceeded by notes about writers whose fathers were writers. In the preface to *Pożegnanie jesieni* [Farewell to Autumn] Włodzimierz Bolecki wrote about Witkacy's childhood on fourteen paragraphs – almost six pages, with one page devoted to the story of his baptism – out of 31 pages of "Biographical Information"⁴⁷. Jan Błoński, on the other hand, devoted eleven paragraphs to Witkacy's childhood, which occupy four and a half pages out of 26 pages of his entire biography⁴⁸. In the preface to *Boundary* [Granica] Włodzimierz Wójcik would question the thesis about the marginalisation of childhood in the prefaces from "Biblioteka Narodowa" with 11 paragraphs about the first dozen or so years of Nałkowska's life, out of 18 paragraphs of her entire story, but by titling this part of his text "Family Environment", he actually confirms the rule. Still, though, in the part devoted to literature, Włodzimierz Wójcik's preface includes Nałkowska's youthful readings and her literary debut at the age of 14⁴⁹. In Wiegandt's preface to *Romans Teresy Hennert* [Teresa Hennert's Romance] we meet Nałkowska, a teenage girl, the author and protagonist of *Dzienniki* [Diaries], a schoolgirl and a novice writer. The topic of this story, which consists of 25 paragraphs, can hardly be called childhood; rather, it is focused on early maturity, Nałkowska's family and social circumstances⁵⁰.

Twenty-first century total biographies set a different standard. For example, Radosław Romaniuk in the biography of Iwaszkiewicz extensively analyses his family relationships, the atmosphere of his childhood, contact with culture and art, education, entertainment, upbringing and socialization, travels, father's death, moving to Warsaw, Elizavetgrad and Kiev with all their consequences, the first

43 A. Zawada, *Wstęp*, in: J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Opowiadania wybrane*, ed. A. Zawada, Wrocław 2001, p. V–XXI.

44 J. Trznadel, *Wstęp*, in: B. Leśmian, *Poezje wybrane*, ed. J. Trznadel, first edition, electronic, based on third edition, extended (1991), Wrocław 2019, epub.

45 E. Wiegandtowa, *Wstęp*, in: J. Wittlin, *Sól ziemi*, ed. E. Wiegandtowa, Wrocław 1991, p. VI–XLII.

46 M. Wójcik, *Wstęp*, in: E. Zegadłowicz, *Zmory. Kronika z zamierchłej przeszłości*, ed. M. Wójcik, Wrocław 2006, p. VII–XLVIII.

47 W. Bolecki, *Wstęp*, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, prefaced and ed. by W. Bolecki, Wrocław 2017, p. V–XI.

48 J. Błoński, *Wstęp*, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Wybór dramatów*, selected and prefaced by J. Błoński, text and notes by M. Kwaśny, second edition, corrected, Wrocław 1983, p. V–XXIX.

49 W. Wójcik, *Wstęp*, in: Z. Nałkowska, *Granica*, ed. W. Wójcik, Wrocław 1971, p. III–XIV.

50 E. Wiegandt, *Wstęp*, in: Z. Nałkowska, *Romans Teresy Hennert*, Wrocław 2001, p. V–XIV.

glimpses of literary talent, tutoring slightly younger students, relationships with peers, emerging (homo)eroticism and existential dramas⁵¹. In a similar manner, Suchanow outlines the background of Gombrowicz's adolescence even more broadly and in even greater detail⁵².

At the same time, childhood can be considered the most important period in a human life. This is what psychoanalysis has been saying since its inception. Let us quote, for example, the words of Sigmund Freud, from the unfinished *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*: "Analytical experience has convinced us that the assertion we hear so often – that the child is, psychologically speaking, the father of the man, and that the experiences of his early years are of unsurpassable significance for his entire later life – is totally correct"⁵³. Suchanow follows this path when analysing Gombrowicz's relationship with his mother. Today, childhood is also important for non-psychoanalytic branches of developmental psychology, which is becoming increasingly popular among a wide range of people, especially parents. We know this for sure: our functioning as adults depends on our childhood experiences.

Children studies values childhood for ethical reasons. Karolina Szymborska in "Teksty drugie" reports on the ambitions of this integrated, interdisciplinary field of research: she sees it as another movement demanding the empowerment of the excluded. Researchers focusing on children studies recognize that our culture is adult-centric and it is high time to pay attention to children and childhood⁵⁴. And even if it is not an area that directly influences biographical studies, it still grows out of a postmodern way of understanding human, the echo of which has been reverberating in the field of biographies for over a dozen years. Childhood is a construct that, similarly to later phases of life, is affected by gender, ethnicity, and social class. It is also a period of socialisation, when we interiorise the rules around us. From a cultural perspective, one can see many factors shaping the image of the world that is reflected in the literary work. But to recognise a child's experience as a legitimate attempt to see experience in childhood. At this point it is hard not to appeal to the common diagnosis: childhood is important to us. It is constant surprise, innocence, and freedom. It is strong emotions, which Chwedorzuk, for example, focuses on, probably due to the fact she based on Kowalska's diary⁵⁵. Childhood is about relationships with family,

51 R. Romaniuk, *Inne życie. Biografia Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2012, chapter "Domy i ludzie", "Wyspa Tymoszwówka", "Stracone pokolenie", "Strona Byszew".

52 K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, op.cit., chapter "Małoszyce", "Stużewska 3".

53 S. Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby, London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 215.

54 K. Szymborska, *Children studies jako perspektywa metodologiczna. Współczesne tendencje w badaniach nad dzieckiem*, "Teksty Drugie" 2016, no. 1, p. 189–205.

55 S. Chwedorzuk, *Kowalska*, op.cit., chapter "Głód czułości".

peers, authorities, and sometimes also perpetrators. It is also school with its curriculum, space, and procedures. For example, Kirchner clearly paints a portrait of young Nałkowska as an above-average talented rebel⁵⁶. Her biography touches upon the first books and encounters with culture. Places where we return with sentiment and which we can dream about for the rest of our lives. Suchanow follows this path, implementing Rybicka's theory about (auto)bio/geo/graphy⁵⁷.

For all these reasons, shortening or omitting childhood in a biography seems to impoverish the reader's view of the protagonist and undermines this – even suspicious – internal and historical truth.

■

In the case of the biography of Schulz, we are forced to look at his childhood, for example, by an alleged dream about castration from the age of seven, recounted to Stefan Szuman in a letter dated 24 July 1932⁵⁸. Many literary scholars interpreted Schulz's art through the prism of this dream, which should be considered important regardless of whether Schulz actually had such a dream or it was invented for the purposes of self-identification⁵⁹. Schulz described his childhood in prose, and he did it so evocatively that it actually became synonymous with childhood as a literary topic. This is supported by the topics discussed in lessons of the Polish literature, and in the high school exam, which are popular indicators that a writer belongs to the canon. The autobiographical nature of Schulz's stories is so obvious that in their interpretation it is difficult not to refer to the writer's biography. Naturally this does not mean that we should naively consider stories as a source of biographical knowledge, which Kaszuba-Dębska tends to do. However, Jarzębski's words from the introduction to *The Cinnamon Shops*, published as part of *Collected Works* remain valid: "It is quite obvious that Schulz identifies with his protagonist, Józef. But this identification has a special character, because – as the protagonist – Schulz somehow projects himself at various moments in life: he is a child, a youngster, and even an old man standing over

56 H. Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane*, op.cit., chapter "Kwiat rodu".

57 See E. Rybicka, *Auto/bio/geo/grafie*, "Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze" 2003, no. 4, p. 7–23.

58 B. Schulz, Letter to Stefan Szuman dated 24 July 1932, in: idem, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for printing by J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 36.

59 See e.g., M. P. Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość. Schulz, egzystencja, literatura*, Kraków 2012, p. 79; W. Owczarski, *Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora*, Gdańsk 2006; T. Olchanowski, *Jungowska interpretacja mitu ojca w prozie Brunona Schulza*, Białystok 2001, p. 73–76; M. Zaleski, *Masochista na Cyterze*, "Teksty Drugie" 2005, no. 3, p. 184–203; S. Rosiek, *Odcięcie. Siedem fragmentów*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 25–64; F. Szałasek, *Erros Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 75–90.

the grave. Therefore, he reviews his life, viewing it from different perspectives and trying to give it different meanings”⁶⁰.

That’s why Ficowski wrote a lot about childhood in *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, which – analysed in their latest version in *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice* – include eleven pages of text with illustrations on biography, and another ten on creativity – a repeated childhood⁶¹. Around the time when Ficowski first published *Regiony* (1967), other ‘life and work’ monographs were also published: *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość* [Zygmunt Krasiński – Debut and Maturity] (1962) by Maria Janion; *Orzeszkowa* (1965) by Maria Żmigrodzka; *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski* (1967) by Wincenty Danek, or *Teofil Lenartowicz i jego poezje* [Teofil Lenartowicz and his poems] (1970) by Jan Nowakowski⁶². Ficowski begins chronologically, from the birth of Schulz. He talks about Drohobych at the time, family, Jews, relationships with parents and peers, school, first manifestations of artistic and literary talent, physical and mental characteristics. This stage of his protagonist’s life goes as far as university studies and World War I. In his view of childhood, Ficowski wants to follow Schulz: “The most spiritually active attitude to the surrounding reality is provided by childhood: each perception, every experience is accompanied by an act of creative imagination, etiological myths are born at every step. This is the primordial beginning, the creation of the world, repeated at the beginning of each individual biography. Reality tasted for the first time, not systematised by experience, unencumbered by any knowledge about its rules and structure, submits to new associations, takes on the shapes proposed to it, comes to life fertilized by a dynamising vision. It is right there, in this myth-creating sphere, that the origin and finish line of Bruno Schulz’s work and his artistic program can be found”⁶³.

Wiesław Budzyński in *Schulz pod kluczem*, jumping from topic to topic, mentions Schulz’s childhood only occasionally. In his work, Schulz is already an adult, not to say – already dead. Naturally, there is a simple explanation of this absence of childhood: the topic had been addressed by Ficowski by that time. Moreover, Budzyński’s interviewees, who were the source of his narrative, were not particularly familiar with the matter.

In his preface to the edition by “Biblioteka Narodowa”, Jarzębski writes that Schulz’s childhood is, as a phase of life, proportional to other phases. It covers

60 J. Jarzębski, *Sklepy bławatne i sklepy cynamonowe*, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 2: *Sklepy cynamonowe*, prefaced and edited by J. Jarzębski, critical supplement S. Rosiek, linguistic ed. M. Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2019, p. 23.

61 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 17–28, 29–38.

62 M. Janion, *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość*, Warszawa 1962; M. Żmigrodzka, *Orzeszkowa. Młodość pozytywizmu*, Warszawa 1965; W. Danek, *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. Żywoć i dzieła*, Kraków 1967; J. Nowakowski, *Teofil Lenartowicz i jego poezje*, Kraków 1970.

63 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 29.



Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square III**, ca. 1936, pencil, ink, 16.5 × 20.3 cm, Museum Literature in Warsaw

Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square I**, ca. 1935, pencil, 20.5 × 16.5 cm, Museum of Literature in Warsaw

Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square II** – illustration to “Spring” included in the Sanatorium under the Hourglass, before 1937, ink, lost drawing





Bruno Schulz, **Pensioner and Boys on a Bench**,
before 1937, pencil, 11.2 × 10.6 cm, Museum
Literature in Warsaw

five paragraphs (two pages), compared to thirteen and a half pages of the entire biographical part. The story about Drohobych at that time serves as the account of the first years of life. Then comes the period of school: Schulz reveals talent, suffers alienation, and shows a predilection for masochism. After a relatively calm time, a difficult family situation occurs. Later, Schulz goes to university⁶⁴. In *Schulz* from the series “A to Polska właśnie”, his childhood looks similar, though the entire book is much more extensive than the preface to *Opowiadania*. The main information is about his good academic results⁶⁵.

Kaszuba-Dębska in *Kobiety i Schulz* portrays Schulz's mother and also briefly mentions his childhood⁶⁶. In *Epoka genialna* she tries to recreate his childhood, but clearly lacks sources. In Schulz's folk school discussed by this author, there is poverty and mischief. Then Schulz writes exams and gets a dog (though this information must have come from the literary biography). He goes to middle school – it seems to be a great time for him: he has great results, good relationships with friends, and he can pursue his great passion – drawing⁶⁷.

It has been 54 years since *Regiony wielkiej herezji* was first published. Since then, there has been no revolution in the biographical view of Schulz's childhood. In terms of the importance of this topic, it still remains – as Rosiek would put it – a challenge for schulzology⁶⁸. Only Kaszuba-Dębska has tried to change this state, rather unsuccessfully. Naturally, the question remains whether such success is to be achieved at all, even in the perspective of everything I mentioned above. Another approach to the comprehensive Schulz's biography can hardly be expected now. However, the calendar of the life, work and reception of Bruno Schulz is being created, governed solely by the order of time, and “is intended to establish the text of Schulz's life”⁶⁹. Next, it should be used by biographers as a starting point for their research.

■

It is important to mention here, perhaps a bit late, the second possible motive of Schulz's biographers. It is the desire to tell something important about all of us: about ourselves, about the reader, not only about the past, but also about the present. Biography can reveal this – even partial – truth, because – as Michał Paweł Markowski wrote – it is “a moral genre, not because it follows moral rules,

64 J. Jarzębski, *Wstęp*, p. IX–X.

65 Idem, *Schulz*, p. 29–31.

66 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, p. 313–314.

67 Eadem, *Bruno*, p. 150.

68 See S. Rosiek, *Biografia Schulza jako wyzwanie (rzucone historii)*, p. 71–81.

69 Ibidem, p. 74.

but because it allows us to better understand other people. And therefore understand ourselves”⁷⁰. It is probably thanks to such possibilities that biographies, including those of Bruno Schulz, are read not only by specialists, but also – and very willingly – by outside readers who seek the shimmering truths of existence. By finding Schulz’s childhood, we will perhaps be able to open up a new perspective to them as well. For someone to repeat one day: “Schulz, my fellow man”⁷¹.

⁷⁰ M. P. Markowski, *Cień biografą*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/cien-biografy-145068> (retrieved: 24 January 2021).

⁷¹ See Jakub Orzeszek, *Schulz nasz bliźni*, “Schulz/Forum” 12, 2018, p. 4.

Aleksandra Skrzypczyk: An Attempt at an Acoustic Biography of Bruno Schulz. Auditory Experiences

The small number of sources on Bruno Schulz's attitude to music significantly hinders research in this area¹. With all that has survived, one can only guess what is now missing from Schulz sources today. The preserved evidence turns out to be insufficient to determine why his prose so often includes metaphorical vocabulary related to music and the world of sounds². If, based on testimonies, it is not possible to determine what he thought about music or what musical experiences he had, an "acoustic biography" may be helpful, understood here as a hypothetical sequence of phonic events Schulz might have participated in. There is no doubt that Schulz was "immersed" in the world of sound. He certainly listened passively, or rather heard and recorded acoustic phenomena. Was he also a music lover (active listener), like his friend, Stanisław Weingarten? What music did he listen to by choice – and what was he forced to listen to? In

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- 1 I tried to determine the issue of Schulz's musicality based on the memories of Maria Chasin, Emil Górski and Ella Schulz-Podstolska in an article for "Teksty Drugie" entitled "Bruno Schulz and Music. An attempt at an acoustic biography of the writer". In short, the arguments for musicality were the following: (1) Górski's mention that Schulz heard music in visual phenomena; (2) two "musical" stories by Schulz, whose main characters were a violinist and an opera singer (the latter survived only in memory of Górski); (3) several years of lost correspondence with Chasin, which stated that Schulz he used "musical language" in letters and in speech; and also (4) several hundred musical terms contained in the stories, musical motifs and the deliberate sound design of the prose. The arguments against were the following: (1) Schulz-Podstolska's memoir in which Schulz contrasted his unmusicality with her father, Lzydor Schulz; and (2) Górski's opinion about Schulz's lack of musical aptitude.
 - 2 The indexing experiment I conducted in *The Cinnamon Shops* proves that in this series of stories the writer uses single musical terms (he uses "musical language" and creates "musical" metaphors) over a hundred times. He also uses these individual lexemes multiple times in each story. This particular way of building artistic expression must have had its reasons – it seems that it would be impossible to refer to musical strategies and techniques while being ignorant and disinterested in this field of art. I included a list of all musical terms appearing in *The Cinnamon Shops* in the form of an appendix "Music and the world of sounds" in the supplement to Schulz's *Dzieła zebrane*. See also: S. Rosiek, "Radość indeksowania (Sklepów cynamonowych i nie tylko)"; and J. Orzeszek, *Ciało / części ciała / wydzieliny. Indeks do "Sklepów cynamonowych"*, "Schulz/Forum" 13, 2019, pp. 155–171; 172–190.

the face of the limited archive, the musical culture during Schulz's "age of genius" can give some idea on the subject. A speculative acoustic biography would allow us to identify the sources of the linguistic shaping of the artistic text. It would consist of the writer's sound experiences – located in a specific historical and cultural moment. To reconstruct how the music of the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century influenced Schulz is to see what musical experiences people (not only those artistically talented) might have had at that time.

Defencelessness in the face of the world of sounds

The world of sounds affects a person throughout their life, even before birth. As Anna Chęćka-Gotkowicz notes, in the mother's womb the baby perceives sounds from the very beginning and retains this vulnerability towards acoustic phenomena until death³. If a person can cut themselves off from visual sensations (by closing the eyes), then closing themselves off from auditory sensations is physiologically impossible (at the quietest moment, we hear the "whoosh of blood" or the beating of our own heart)⁴. This kind of "sound violence" means that even if we would like to imagine inspired Schulz writing *The Cinnamon Shops* in silence, or standing among focused students in a soundless (muted) hall, walking around the empty and soundless market square in Drohobych, we know that such a state was impossible. Schulz had to participate in the soundscape of the place. Even if he did not want to.

We also have evidence that he suffered because of noise. In a letter to Tadeusz Breza, he wrote about how tiring his work at school was: "I feel disheartened: I wasn't given the leave I counted on so much. I'm staying at school in Drohobych, where this rabble will continue to frolic and play on my nerves. You must know that my nerves have scattered throughout the entire handicraft workshop, spread on the floor, wallpapered the walls, and covered the workshops and the anvil with thick woven fabric"⁵. We also know that he wanted musical silence, a pause, a relaxation that would be a natural element of work. In a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz, he complained: "You overestimate the benefits of my situation in Drohobych. What I miss here is silence, my own musical silence, a calm pendulum, subject to its own gravity, with a clean line of track, undisturbed by any

³ A. Chęćka-Gotkowicz, *Ucho i umysł. Szkice o doświadczeniu muzyki*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2012, pp. 29–60.

⁴ See also: J. Momro, *Ucho nie ma powieki*, Kraków 2020.

⁵ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Tadeusz Breza of December 2, 1934, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for printing by J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 53. Hereinafter referred to as: KL.

foreign influence. This silence, substantial, positive – complete – is almost creativity itself. These matters that I believe I want to express happen above a certain threshold of silence, and they are formed in a centre brought to perfect balance. Even the peace I have here, even though more perfect than in that happier era, has become insufficient for an increasingly sensitive, more fastidious vision. It is getting harder and harder for me to believe it. And these things require blind faith, taken on credit. Only after being united by this faith do they agree to struggle to be – to exist to some degree”⁶.

Based on Schulz’s self-characterization, one may conclude that time had a musical character for Schulz. After the sequence of events (sounds) there must have been “stillness”, the silence which could be formed like plastic material which conditions creativity. The moment before creation (of the presented world) was essential to him. In the tension of silence, in the moment before the performance (of a sound or word), the writer became similar to a musician: the longer the silence lasted, the greater the desire was to fill it with sound, to fill the void with content. Finally, Schulz’s confession is a sign of lack of relaxation or rest coupled with work, like silence and sound⁷. A musical work strives for external silence, gravitates towards non-existence, and lasts as long as the artist performs the music. Therefore, there is always more external silence (understood even as the sounds of the world) than organized sound matter. Schulz seems to be saying, however, that there was silence within the composition, a *fermata* or musical pause which co-created the work and organized sound structures and musical thought.

According to Chęćka-Gotkowicz, the duration of a pause in musical notation varies – it usually depends on the adopted tempo and rhythmic value. It is often colloquially understood as “breath”, “rest”, “hold”, or “a sigh” in French. In silence the sound of a (musical) thought resonates, it coexists inseparably with the sound and becomes present only in its “context”. Musical breath allows you to stop in time and feel your own existence⁸. Musical time – the time perceived by Schulz is therefore characterized by alternating appearance and disappearance, creation and destruction, sound and silence, being and non-being⁹. For Schulz, musical silence was a condition for creation. This need and necessity for silence was perfectly expressed by the Indian mystic Kirpal Singh, who wrote that “the essence of sound is felt in both motion and silence, it passes from existent to

⁶ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Andrzej Pleśniewicz of March 4, 1936, KL, p. 120.

⁷ Schulz repeatedly seeks time off from work, requesting leave. See Bruno Schulz’s letters to the school authorities, KL, p. 228, 232, 234–239.

⁸ An interesting essay is devoted to the issue of musical silence by Anna Chęćka-Gotkowicz, from whose book I draw inspiration for the interpretation of a fragment of Schulz’s letter. A. Chęćka-Gotkowicz, “Wymiary ciszy”, in: eadem, *Ucho i umysł*, p. 29–60.

⁹ Ibidem.

nonexistent. When there is no sound, it is said that there is no hearing, but that does not mean that hearing has lost its preparedness. Indeed, when there is no sound, hearing is most alert, and when there is sound the hearing nature is least developed”¹⁰.

In order to be creative, Schulz needed musical silence. With its potential he was perhaps weaving a story about the soundscape of his hometown. Polluting this pristine time of creation with noise – sonic violence – paralyzed his imagination. In silence, the senses could sharpen to new (or old, imaginative) experiences; the “space of silence” enabled an aesthetic experience. He repeated this in a letter to Stefan Szuman, when he wrote about Rilke’s poetry: “It is a very quiet, closed-in world – you have to go very far from the noise and go very deep to hear this poetry”¹¹.

Auditory experiences. Passive hearing – active listening

The impact of sounds on humans has been studied by anthropology of sound (sound studies). Sounds of the world, perceived consciously and unconsciously, contribute to the creation of personality, they have the ability to create emotional states. Audial experiences of a human being include their entire audiosphere, that is, the sound environment perceived by the sense of hearing, including the melosphere (music), the sonosphere (sounds) and the phonosphere (voice)¹². It builds the sonic identity of an individual, shapes their sensitivity and the way they perceive reality. The multitude of such identities in the similar sound space creates entire “acoustic communities”. The sound image of Drohobych reflected the nature of the local community, its needs, features and preferences. The (sound) world of this community consisted primarily of natural sounds, perfectly described in *The Cinnamon Shops*: biophones, for example, swarms of “buzzing” flies, birds flapping their wings, horses clattering their hooves; geophones – the noise of alder trees, the sound of wind during a storm; anthrophones – the performances of organ grinders, the tolling of church bells, the clatter of women’s shoes...

These sensory experiences allowed Schulz to “recreate” the *genius loci*, the sounds of the space; they allowed him to reflect the difference and uniqueness of the sound landscape of the place where he lived. Maybe the sentimental description of the harmony of childhood sounds was for him a response to the sonic

¹⁰ K. Singh, *Naam or Word*, Delhi: Ruhani Satsang 1970, p. 59.

¹¹ Letter from Bruno Schulz to Stefan Szuman of July 24, 1932, KL, p. 36.

¹² They were described in detail by Maria Gołaszewska in the book *Estetyka pięciu zmysłów*, Kraków 1997. See also: R. Losiak, *Muzyka przestrzeni publicznej miasta. Z badań nad pejzażem dźwiękowym Wrocławia*. “Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego” 2008, no. 11, p. 253–264.

violence associated with schoolwork, changes and new acoustic landscape (today known as “noise pollution”¹³): ubiquitous noise, technological, industrial, and urban revolutions, the bustle of factories or the roar of gunshots during the war, which announced the disintegration of the world¹⁴. Today, researchers have no doubt that both conscious and unconscious audio experiences related to nature and human activity shape us profoundly. Although at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries field recording did not exist yet¹⁵ (the first such recordings were made in the 1930s and 1940s¹⁶), based on the testimonies and the historical and cultural context, we can collect and “recreate” Schulz’s hypothetical auditory experiences.

Anacrusis. Childhood

Little do we know about what musical experiences the childhood of Schulz consisted of. In his fiction, the sound of creaking floors, snoring of counter jumpers (sleeping on the lowest floors of the tenement house), the rumble of kitchen appliances and banging of tin pots in the attic resonate through the narrator’s house; it sounds of the clatter of servant’s slippers and trills with a high bird’s clangour. One may assume that Schulz’s childhood involved almost exclusively passive listening that was hardly the result of conscious choice. Young Schulz took part in a performance of *Izydor*, eleven years older than him; he went to the opera with his parents and, amazed, he listened to street musicians stopping by the windows of the tenement house – which he would later illustrate and describe in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. He played with mechanical instruments and music boxes, which he would soon write about in “The Comet”. In his family home, there might have been a music box or a miniature barrel organ, present in most middle-class houses at that time¹⁷, perhaps even similar to the one he would describe years later in *The Booke*.

13 Raymond Murray Schaffer wrote about noise pollution of the world’s soundscape from the perspective of music ecology.

14 I use the terminology systematized by Sebastian Bernat in *Wokół pojęcia soundscape. Dyskusja terminologiczna*, “Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego” 2015, no. 30, p. 45–57.

15 I use a well-established English term meaning practical and technical field recordings, i.e. recording sounds outside the studio space, later saved as digital audio files.

16 Between 1930 and 1960, ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax was the first to do field recording. He recorded the sounds of work in the port and on the coast. In 1940, Ludwig Koch used the phonograph to record bird sounds, later released on gramophone records. See <https://www.irvteibel.com> (retrieved: 21 January 2020).

17 Prószyński was convinced of the mass presence of barrel organs or music boxes in townspeople’s homes at the end of the 19th century. See S. Prószyński, *Blaski i cienie dziejów katarynek*, in: *idem, Świat mechanizmów grających*, Warszawa 1994, p. 205.

It can be assumed that he was taken to klezmer concerts, which made the atmosphere of parks and spontaneously arranged garden restaurants more attractive. He took part in traditional celebrations (such as bar mitzvah) accompanied by Jewish live music. Schulz's family most likely took an active part in artistic events, just like most Jewish families did in the Truskavets-Boryslav-Drohobych district who had access to culture and education. As a junior high school student, he participated in school performances; he also listened to liturgical songs during services to which the students went together. However, he did not recognize a musical talent in himself and remained absorbed in visual arts.

In an essay devoted to the work of Ephraim Moses Lilien, Schulz described his first form-creating contact with art. He recalled the book his brother borrowed for him when he was fourteen. It was *Songs from the Ghetto* with a collection of poems by Morris Rosenfeld, translated from Yiddish into German (*Lieder des Ghetto*), with Lilien's drawings. The book consisted of simple and extremely melodic, rhythmic songs describing the work of Jewish workers, especially tailors (the author of the song spent his youth in exile in America, earning a living as a tailor)¹⁸.

Supplemented with black and white drawings, Rosenfeld's poems cover such topics as work, love, and death. What seems most interesting in the context of music in Schulz's life and work is the way he described the first encounter with Rosenfeld's collection, his "first spring of sensitivity", his "mystical marriage with art". This is what he wrote about that moment: "When I opened the covers with the weeping willow and the harp, I was dazzled. From the solemn silence that suddenly occurred within me, I realized that I was standing at the gate of a great and decisive experience, and I turned the pages of this book, stunned, with a somewhat joyful fear and happy, moving from one delight to another. I spent the whole day reading Lilien's book, enchanted, unable to put it down, I was full of shining black and white chords brimming with pathos, rising from the silence of these cards and ornaments"¹⁹.

The breakthrough that then took place filled Schulz with sounds: thanks to the aesthetic experience, he himself became music – visual impressions evoked associations with the auditory experience, the senses mixed, and Rosenfeld's songs evoked instruments in his imagination; Schulz heard musical compositions in them. His first conscious experience of art thus became a half-(imagined) musical experience. Such events often create an artistic language, which, with

¹⁸ M. Rosenfeld, *Pieśni pracy*, przeł. A.T. i S.H., Warszawa 1906, p. 3. See http://rcin.org.pl/Content/69099/WA248_89676_F-22-472_rosenfeld-piesni_o.pdf (retrieved: 5 August 5 2019).

¹⁹ B. Schulz, "E.M. Lilien", in: idem, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 7: *Szkice krytyczne*, edited by W. Bolecki, commentaries and footnotes by M. Wójcik, linguistic ed. P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 128.

references to the art of sounds, allow us to describe different matters such as literature or painting.

A little later, Schulz reviewed Lilien's work. The musical metaphor would remain a constant point of reference for him: "He is immediately characterized by a strong sense of linear rhythm, to which he subordinates all other forms of expression. Almost each of his drawings is based on a rhythm that permeates it and runs unstoppably like a triumphant fanfare, taking in and unifying all the details of the drawing with its wave. This rhythm, this inner melody takes us immediately to a festive and solemn sphere, to the dimension of pure and sublime poetry [...] white and shiny lines rise as a triumphant cantilena on the shining carbuncle of the night [...] it is strong and intoxicating poetry, hypnotizing with its solemn gesture or solemn, incanting dance of slender figures made as if from white silence, accompanied by the humming of night-black chords. From the conflicts of black and white, Lilien extracted the crystalline music of the spheres. He dedicates all the other melodies to this one"²⁰.

This way of writing about drawings persists throughout most of the argument, in which Schulz particularly often emphasizes the importance of rhythm. The ornamentation was – in his opinion – painted with a "decisive rhythm", kept the "same rhythmic character", and the viewer's eye followed the same rhythm of each vignette. The book was "composed", "tuned steadfastly and contrapuntally into an integral whole"²¹. The fourteen-year-old Schulz – at least that is how he described himself more than 30 years later – noticed the melodiousness and rhythm of the Rosenfeld song; he "heard" music not only in the poetic text itself, he also noticed analogies to it in the drawings as such. It is difficult to imagine that constant musical metaphors would accompany a writer who was indifferent to sound matters. What experiences might he have had with the music of his time, then? Was it shaped by a great neo-romantic symphony (Strauss, Rachmaninoff), musical impressionism (Debussy), verismo (Puccini, Moniuszko), or a much earlier tradition (Mozart, Chopin), maybe the avant-garde music of the time, or perhaps American light jazz?

Schulz as a music lover? Musical culture in some European cities in 1910–1940

During World War I, Schulz was in Vienna. One of the most important European opera houses, the Vienna Opera, then known as the Hof-Operntheater, offered world premieres of the greatest works. At that very time, in the cultural centre



²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 132–133.

²¹ Ibidem.

of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Schulz had the opportunity to see *The Knight of the Rose* by Richard Strauss, *Parsifal* by Richard Wagner, *Notre Dame* by Franz Schmidt²². However, considering his poor financial situation (he regularly received aid for refugees²³), most likely he could not afford to actively participate in the artistic life of the capital city. His financial situation had improved slightly when he visited Vienna in 1923. In the years 1918–1939 in the capital of Austria, the greatest works of world music were performed, including *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi or *Der Rosenkavalier* by Strauss²⁴.

Schulz had many opportunities to see performances in Poland, too. The opera house in Lviv had been continuously offering a repertoire of the highest quality since the second half of the 18th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, on the stages of the Lviv Opera you could watch Italian and French performances, for example *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi, *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, *Faust* by Charles Gounod, *Madame Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The frequently performed *Halka*, a Polish opera by Stanisław Moniuszko also achieved worldwide fame²⁵.

According to Michał Piekarski, in Lviv before 1918 (Schulz was a student of the Lviv Polytechnic then) one could attend Polish private views, including as many as six Wagner operas (*Lohengrin*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Rienzi*, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, *Twilight of the Gods*). Later, the opera house held premieres of great works, including *Eros and Psyche* by Ludomir Różycki and *Salome* by Strauss²⁶.

Roman Jasiński, a pianist, immortalized in the photo with Schulz and Witkacy from 1934²⁷, in the publication *Koniec epoki. Muzyka w Warszawie* reconstructed

22 *Kronika opery*, directed by M. Michalik, Dortmund 1990, p. 339–377; Wiener Staatsoper Archive, <https://archiv.wiener-staatsoper.at/search?since=01.02.1923&until=15.07.1923> (retrieved: 10/09/2019). See also: J. Kański, *Przewodnik operowy*, Kraków 2014; B. Horowicz, *Teatr operowy. Historia opery. Realizacje sceniczne. Perspektywy*, Warszawa 1963; P. Kamiński, *Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Kraków 2015; K. Stromenger, *Przewodnik operowy*, Warszawa 1959.

23 J. Sass, *Kronika uchodźcy*, “Schulz/Forum” 10, 2017, p. 22–40; as well as daily entries by Joanna Sass in the Calendar of the Life, Work and Reception of Bruno Schulz, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/lata/1915> (retrieved: December 17, 2018).

24 Wiener Staatsoper Archive, <https://archiv.wiener-staatsoper.at/search?since=01.02.1923&until=15/07/1923> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

25 *Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, ed. and rev. by The Earl of Harewood, London 1989.

26 M. Piekarski, “Życie muzyczne Lwowa od drugiej połowy XVIII wieku”, in: idem, *Muzyka we Lwowie. Od Mozarta do Majerskiego. Kompozytorzy, muzycy, instytucje*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 28–29.

27 Jasiński's meeting with Schulz was recorded not only in the famous New Year's Eve photo with Witkacy, but also in the memory of Gombrowicz. After the war, Jasiński himself described this meeting as follows: “[Witkacy] visited Janek [Kochanowski] quite often, and even brought Bruno Schulz, the author of these strange, newly published *The Cinnamon Shops*. This book made a great impression on me, and I immediately felt its uniqueness. So I was very curious about this meeting with Schulz, who turned out to be a man as delicate and discreet as he was unglamorous. After all, Witkacy was able to untangle him, too” – R. Jasiński, *Zmierzch starego świata. Wspomnienia 1900–1945*, Kraków 2008, p. 535.

musical events in the capital in the years 1927–1939 and the situation of cultural institutions at that time. He recalled that many famous artists came to Warsaw at that time: “Those were the times when its [the Warsaw Philharmonic’s] existence was closely connected with usually attractive, frequent performances by foreign artists of world fame. Warsaw had never seen such a galaxy of the greatest virtuosos and composers moving across the Philharmonic’s stage. It is safe to say that there was no such outstanding artist in the world at that time who would not have visited the Warsaw stage at least once”²⁸.

The greatest stars gave concerts at the Warsaw Philharmonic, Karol Szymanowski performed on regular basis²⁹. Schulz visited the capital many times in the years 1924–1938, mainly to establish personal and professional contacts³⁰. We are not sure how he spent his time with the Polish artistic elite. We only know that he went to the theatre with Nałkowska, celebrated New Year 1935 with Gombrowicz, posed for Witkacy’s making a portrait of him, was immortalized in a photo with artists during a party, and often visited Kuncewiczowa³¹. He talked to writers primarily about art, philosophy, and his own prose. Did they go to the philharmonic and the opera? Since attending performances and concerts was part of the social life of Polish artists at that time, that might have been the case. The meetings were often enriched by musical performances. After the war, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa notes in her memoirs that during a party celebrating the publication of *The Stranger* at Kuncewiczowa’s house in Warsaw, Schulz witnessed the violinist Irena Dubińska playing Brahms’ concerto in D major³².

It is also known that he went to the theatre with Izabela Czermakowa, who would remember his fear and peculiar “sensitivity to sounds”. In her memoirs from 1958, published a few years later in “*Twórczość*”, Czermakowa wrote: “I remember a wonderful evening when Bruno, in a quiet, soft voice, read fragments of his *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*; the book was published much later. [...] Once we went to the neighbouring Truskavets. It was a sunny but cold October. Bright dahlias bloomed in the empty old spa park. That day, Bruno was particularly talkative, he talked about his agoraphobia, his excessive sensitivity to sounds, and the fact that he only lived in depth, not in breadth, like other

28 R. Jasiński, *Koniec epoki. Muzyka w Warszawie (1927–1939)*, Warszawa 1986, p. 5.

29 Cf. H. Swolkień, *Spotkanie z operą*, Warszawa 1971.

30 See <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/znaj/warszawa> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

31 See R. Jasiński, *Zmierzch starego świata*, p. 462; S. Okołowicz, *Śliwka i tacet. O spotkaniach Schulza i Witkacego*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016, pp. 43–64; *Rozmowy z Marią Kuncewiczową*, selected, edited and prefaced by H. Zaworska, Warszawa 1983, pp. 234–235.

32 H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Bruno Schulz. Wspomnienie*, “Przekrój” 1958, nr 657, p. 8–9. Cf. H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, “Wspomnienie o Brunonie Schulzu”, in: eadem, *Bunt wspomnień*, Warszawa 1959, pp. 330–336.

people”³³. Czermakowa came to Drohobych many times and spent long hours with Schulz on evening walks around his hometown. However, she did not elaborate on what Schulz might have had in mind at that time – how he perceived the sounds of the world, how they influenced him, whether he considered this sensitivity to sounds as a burdensome condition, or for the ability that allowed him to “hear more”. She focused on the writer’s attachment to Drohobych, which he predicted would become the place of his death.

A summary of music events in several major cities the writer visited would include these: Vienna (1914–1918, 1923), Warsaw (1924–1938), Lviv (1911–1914, 1923, 1937) and Paris (1938)³⁴, as well as the repertoire of operas and theatres. Still, we cannot confirm the thesis that Schulz actively listened to music and attended performances. The only traces of operatic experiences can be found in his collections of stories. In *The Cinnamon Shops*, Schulz refers to *Twilight of the Gods*, one of the four parts of the musical drama of Wagner’s opera *The Ring of the Nibelungen*: “We often liked to listen at the door – the silence, full of sighs and whispers of this rubble crumbling in cobwebs, this twilight of the gods decaying in boredom and monotony”³⁵. In “Spring”, he recalls Don Juan (following either Molière’s play or *Don Giovanni* with music by Mozart). In his prose, he refers to classical and klezmer music. The narrator listening to a performance in “Spring”³⁶ equates nature with instruments, perhaps travestying musical drama.

Repertoire of the sanatorium

Before World War II, Schulz stayed in several resort towns³⁷. According to the memories of Irena Kejlin-Mitelman, in 1922, he visited the spa town of Bad Kudowa located in the Sudetes. That is where he met her mother. The moment

33 According to Czermakowa, Schulz predicted his death as follows: “He also said that wherever he was, after just a few days he longed morbidly for Drohobych, for heaven, which is only here close and protective. We climbed a hill with a distant view of the entire oil basin, the lights of countless drilling towers twinkling in the early autumn twilight. ‘I can’t live anywhere else’, Bruno said then. – And I will die here” – I. Czermakowa, *Bruno Schulz, “Twórczość”* 1965, no 10, pp. 100–101. Czermakowa did not provide the title of the play that Schulz saw (“Only once did we manage to take him to the theatre, which at that time, under the direction of Schiller and Horzyca, was at a very high level. Bruno Schulz was restless and nervous all evening, and only regained his sense of humour when we returned home and sat down in a quiet room. Ibidem, p. 99).

34 Information based on the Calendar of Bruno Schulz’s Life, Work and Reception, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/> (retrieved: 10/09/2019).

35 B. Schulz, *Sklepy cynamonowe*, in: idem, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów, wstęp i oprac.* J. Jarzębski, Wrocław 1989, p. 64. Hereinafter as: OP.

36 OP, p. 155.

37 J. Sass, *7 sierpnia – 24 września 1915*, in: *Kalendarz życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza*, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915>; J. Orzeszek, *Bad Kudowa*, ibidem, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/miejsc/bar-kudowa> (retrieved: 18.12.2018).

of the meeting was accompanied by music that could be heard at the bench where Schulz was sitting.

Health resorts, apart from treatments, offered various attractions and activities such as artistic performances, dances or excursions. Some of them were equipped with libraries and recreation rooms. Mitelman's story shows that Schulz was reluctant to leave the spa. The only thing that excited him was the Skull Chapel³⁸. Perhaps the introverted fine artist was not interested in concerts or dances: he was more willing to spend time with friends or alone, drawing or reading.

Marienburg, where he stayed in 1915, had a rich artistic program to offer³⁹. There were, among others, classical music concerts and performances by musicians who were relaxing in the resort. Schulz had the opportunity to go to one of the official dances in Kursaal. Three times a day, the spa guests could enjoy performances by the spa orchestra. String quartets and orchestras played in restaurants. He could listen to classical and popular music performed by dancing bands, as well as folk music played by Gypsy bands⁴⁰. It is difficult to say what his attitude towards music performed in resorts was. It was perhaps just a background for his social life. Based on Schulz's alleged musical experiences, one might say that music performed in the park (in resorts in Truskavets) stimulated musical metaphors, and the restaurant musicians in Marienburg may have inspired parts of "Spring" related to music. Schulz attended (either willingly or reluctantly) chamber concerts. He listened to music performed in informal circumstances, in rooms, small halls and parks. It seems that the intimate atmosphere and the natural environment in which he listened to music inspired him the most.

Musical culture in the Drohobych high school

As a student and later a teacher at the pre-war Władysław Jagiełło High School in Drohobych, Schulz probably also came across several musical genres: classical compositions, folk, religious and popular music (e.g. jazz, popular in the 1930s)⁴¹. He listened to music in church several times a year, assuming that as a teacher he was obliged to participate in masses that inaugurated major school events. It

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ J. Sass, *7 sierpnia – 24 września 1915*, in: *Kalendarz życia, twórczości i recepcji Brunona Schulza*, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915>, <http://www.schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-sierpnia-24-wrzesnia-1915> (retrieved: 18.12.2018).

⁴⁰ *Przewodnik po Marienburgu (Mariánské Lázně) z ilustracjami*, Marienburg 1931, <https://polona.pl/item/przewodnik-po-marienburgu-marianske-lazne-z-ilustracjami,MTU4MTk4Mg/1/#info:meta> data (retrieved: 5.10.2019).

⁴¹ Schulz's school report for 1903/1904 shows that he did not attend singing lessons. There is a slash in this subject field. Perhaps he didn't have such classes in his curriculum at all. A reprint of documents containing Schulz's grades for the school years 1903/1904 and 1908/1909 can be found in *Regions of the Great Heresy* – see J. Ficowski, op. cit., pp. 21–22.

is not known whether religious art was a source of inspiration or, on the contrary, it was a forced part of education and later paid work. High school reports show that, as a teacher, he watched many school performances throughout the year⁴². Student productions included mainly patriotic repertoire. Therefore, Schulz listened to songs and anthems performed by the school choir, as well as compositions reaching back to the folk tradition (for example *Dudziarz* by Wieniawski)⁴³. One of the reports recorded the repertoire in detail, which gives us an idea about musical experiences at the school. The reporter mentions Hlawiak's "Miłość ojczyzny" [Love of the Homeland], Wybicki's "Mazurek Dąbrowskiego" and Żukowski's "Wieniec pieśni strzeleckich" [Wreath of Shooting Songs]⁴⁴.

In the years 1929–1938, Professor Schulz might have listened to an average of two artistic programs a month. There are no sources about his attitude towards the music performed at the school – if we do not count the confessions in letters in which he disapproved of his workplace as such⁴⁵. One can venture to say that the artistic culture of the school in some way shaped its student, and later its employee. Patriotic performances by choirs of boys and men and the school orchestra periodically reminded the writer of the history of Poland; radio broadcasts introduced him to more important compositions and they presented composers (Mozart, Chopin, Schubert). Thanks to theoretical and practical classes, Schulz had the opportunity to learn musical forms and techniques, such as symphony, fugue, sonatina, to which he would refer many times in prose and reviews⁴⁶. However, it is impossible to determine if he took an active part in the artistic life of the school – at least as a teacher. If we assume that he was forced to watch performances that bored him, this type of musical experience also had an impact – it must have discouraged him from music for a long time. Regardless of whether the writer's attitude towards artistic events was affirmative or critical, there is no doubt that the atmosphere of school events influenced him and left a mark on his musical experiences.

Experiencing pop music: klezmer, folk, jazz

Schulz certainly listened to the music of the early 20th century, knew the musical tradition and popular music played by gramophones and barrel organs. He

⁴² See "Sprawozdania Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne 1929–1938".

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ See "Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne 1929/30, 30/31, 31/32", p. 18.

⁴⁵ "List Brunona Schulza do Tadeusza Brezy z 2 grudnia 1934 roku", KL, p. 53.

⁴⁶ See "Sprawozdanie Dyrekcji Gimnazjum Państwowego im. Króla Władysława Jagiełły w Drohobyczu za lata szkolne" 1937/38, p. 31.

attended musical events, saw band performances, heard klezmer music popular in Drohobych and listened to music in restaurants, parks and in the streets. In the interwar period, there was no city whose streets would not be filled with fair, orchestral or klezmer music. The Drohobych region was no exception. At that time, the townspeople were frequently exposed to amateur music. Issachar Fater, author of a publication devoted to musicians of Jewish origin, points to the ubiquity of music among the Jewish community in the interwar Poland: “The Jewish masses in Poland sang everywhere and always. There was no need to look for songs, because they could be heard at every step – maids, tailor’s apprentices, girls sitting at home and Hasidic boys, modest mothers and rude, simple coachmen sang songs. Rich children sang because they were bursting with joy, and poor orphans to express their grief and resentment. And these songs were very different: street songs ‘about the bitter fate of an orphan’, sentimental tangos about broken hearts, songs of the working class calling ‘not to let others drink their blood anymore’, pioneering, encouraging people to build a country and settle in it, Hasidic songs calling for dancing and the cantor’s tear-jerking singing. We could also hear serious classical songs from the world music repertoire”⁴⁷.

Schulz listened to the music of the streets of Drohobych. The Jewish community there was particularly musical. In *The Book of Klezmer. The History, the Music, the Folklore* memories of a Drohobych resident about the performances are presented: “In my town of Drohobych the klezmerim played Yiddish folk-songs as well as swing, fox-trots, rhumba, cha-cha, waltzes, Russian songs, and so on. Many learned how to read music so they could play the tune exactly as it had been recorded. There were klezmerim who had such a good ear that they could write down exactly what they heard on the radio after listening to the tune only once. They not only wrote the melody line but the harmony and rhythm parts for all the instruments. I played in one band where we played a lot of the music from the radio, which came to Drohobych in the 1930s. The leader was Dr. Staszek Vilder. He was very clever, with a great ear. He wrote the parts for saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass, and two violins. I played in this ensemble for weddings, restaurants, and even for the silent films. We used to play ‘Bar Kokhba’ under Tom Mix and Valentino films”⁴⁸.

However, it is not only Drohobych and Poland that bring musical experiences to Schulz. He spent August 1938 in Paris. His guide in the world of French leisure was Georges Rosenberg (brother of Schulz’s friend, pianist Maria Chasin) with whom he had long conversations about philosophy and art. Rosenberg especially remembers going to the cabaret Casanova in Montmartre and the

⁴⁷ I. Fater, *Muzyka żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym*, przeł. E. Świdorska, Warsaw 1997, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mikhle Lepert, Wrocław, 12.03.1984, quoted in: Y. Strom, *The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore*, Chicago 2011, p. 113.

writer's reaction to the promiscuity of Parisian cocottes⁴⁹. It was in the capital of France that the cabaret was born, dominated by songs touching upon current socio-political issues. In the 1930s, a district of Montmartre already had the status of the artistic centre of Paris. The twenty-three-year-old Edith Piaf performed there, too, at the time⁵⁰. Performances competed with the cinema, so they had to be more attractive to the viewers. The musical and visual impressions that Paris provided Schulz with were much stronger than those he had access to in Poland (he wrote about this to Romana Halpern: "I saw beautiful, shocking, and terrible things. I was greatly impressed by the wonderful women [...], promiscuity, pace of life"⁵¹).

At the end of the 19th century, factories in Łódź and Warsaw produced the first gramophones. At the beginning of the 20th century, the cinematography and phonography flourished, film studios and cinemas were established and became popular. Music publishing houses were founded, and garden theatres were set up. Technical progress allowed for wider access to music. The organ grinders were gradually replaced by actors and cabaret performers, and the place of popular home musical boxes (mini-grinders, music boxes) was taken by gramophones and radios – more modern devices which played not one, but hundreds of songs⁵².

The appearance of the radio in Drohobych in the 1930s provided access to popular and classical music⁵³. Schulz not only read his own works⁵⁴ on the radio, but also listens to hits played on gramophone records. The radio had a very ambitious program. In addition to fragments of prose from around the world, you could also listen to great concerts, recitals, and all kinds of classical music⁵⁵.

49 "List Georges'a Marshaka Rosenberga do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 15 sierpnia 1965 roku", in: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje*, edited by J. Kandziora, Gdańsk.

50 See W. Szczotkowski, *Edith Piaf. Życie, mił i legenda*, Łódź 1993. See also: P. Szarota, *Paryż 1938*, Warszawa 2019.

51 "List Brunona Schulza do Romany Halpern z 29 sierpnia 1938 roku", KL, p. 181.

52 More information on this subject can be found in Michalski's book and in Kwiatkowski's publications: D. Michalski, *Powróćmy jak za dawnych lat... Historia polskiej muzyki rozrywkowej lata 1900–1939*, introduction by S. Grodzieńska, Warsaw 2007; M. J. Kwiatkowski, *Narodziny polskiego radia. Radiofonia w Polsce w latach 1918–1929*, Warsaw 1972.

53 According to Jan Onaczyszyn, the radio was made available in Borysław in the mid-1920s: "My uncles, Piotr and Leopold, lived on the floor above the farmers. They were very modern, young people who installed a radio in their home in 1925–1926. What an undertaking it was!" – see W. Budzyński, "Cywilizacja radiowa", in: idem, *Miasto Schulza*, Warsaw 2005, p. 21.

54 See A. Skrzypczyk, *Głos Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 15, 2020, pp. 224–230.

55 The detailed radio program was published in the "Biuletyn Radiofoniczny". See "Biuletyn Radiofoniczny dla Użytku Prasy. Wydawnictwo tygodniowe Wydziału Prasy i Propagandy Polskiego Radia", R. 6, no 38, 22 September 1935, p. 4, <https://polona.pl/item/biuletyn-radjo-foniczny-dla-uzytyku-prasy-wydawnictwo-tygodniowe-wydzialu-prasy-i,ODU2MDAyNDc/0/#info:metadata> (retrieved: 30.07.2020).

Soon, Schulz would also be able to listen to music in the cinema. His brother Izydor founded the Urania cinema in Drohobych at the beginning of the 20th century, which Schulz attended as a child and teenager⁵⁶. These experiences are perhaps what he presented later in “Noc lipcowa” [“A Night in July”]: “I spent the nights of that summer in the town’s only cinema, staying there until the end of the last performance”⁵⁷. He probably also went to the cinema in Lviv, Vienna and Warsaw. Małgorzata Hendrykowska wrote: “Due to the universality of the shows themselves and the variety of places of exhibitions, it should be assumed that [...] already around 1907 it was simply impossible not to get familiar with cinema”⁵⁸. What movies did he watch? What did he listen to? Until the 1930s, that is until films got sound, he mainly looked at images in silent films, even though some screenings were accompanied by live music – by pianists and entire bands, later replaced by gramophone records.

In the 1920s, Polish cinema was dominated by propaganda and patriotic repertoire (*Cud nad Wisłą*, *Pan Tadeusz*, *Trędowata*, *Grób nieznanego żołnierza*⁵⁹). With the development of sound film, as a well-formed writer, Schulz could listen to recordings of *The Jazz Singer* by the Warner brothers and *Moralność pani Dulskiej* by Bolesław Nawolin⁶⁰; he could also watch the adaptations of Nałkowska’s *Granica* or Żeromski’s *Wierna rzeka*⁶¹.

Coda

Even though Schulz’s statements about music and titles indicating the connection between the text and the musical work are not as numerous as in the case of Witkacy’s *Sonata Belzebuba*, his prose contains extensive references to music, which allows us to assume that music could have been the subject of unknown metatextual statements that did not survive the war – after all, most of Schulz’s correspondence, several stories, the manuscript of *Messiah*, and also many of his drawings were lost. The references to music in prose inspire us to look for some connections Schulz might have had with the art of sounds – so easily visible in the works of other writers.

56 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 130. A discussion of Schulz’s cinematographic imagination can be found in Paweł Sitkiewicz, *Fantasmagorie. Rozważania o filmowej wyobraźni Brunona Schulza*, “Schulz/Forum” 1, 2012, pp. 35–46.

57 B. Schulz, “A Night in July”, in: idem, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska, introduction by John Updike, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 83.

58 M. Hendrykowska, *Śladami tamtych cieni. Film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895–1914*, Poznań 1993, p. 239.

59 *The Cinema of Central Europe*, ed. P. Hames, London 2004, p. 25–33.

60 *Historia kina polskiego*, pod red. T. Lubelski, K. Zarębski, Warszawa 2007.

61 Ibidem.

Recreating Schulz's hypothetical acoustic experiences has also a broader dimension – it provides insight into the sphere of potential musical experiences of interwar writers, who often attempted to describe musical composition. Through the prism of music in Schulz's life and work, one can finally see not only him, but also the cultural context: how popular music was present in the acoustic space in the interwar period, what role school education played in Schulz's musical tastes, what repertoire the operas and theatres had, what could be listened to on the radio and in cabaret, and what those songs were about. Research in this field will make us aware of what was listened to in the “prehistory” of great technological development – it will help us see in the barrel organ the first attempts at making music a mass phenomenon, and to realize how the sound landscape of the world from over a hundred years ago differed from the one we have today.

Given the rich orchestration of Schulz's prose, the question about his voice in the matter of music, about his musical modes of expression and about his attitude to sounds becomes an obvious call for research, even though – perhaps – doomed to weaving an argument from scraps of memories and guesswork. Acoustic biography will therefore be one way of making sense of the author's life, which – like any type of biography – passes selected facts through its filter (sometimes artistically distorting them to suit its needs)⁶². This is undoubtedly a metaphor; nevertheless, there is an important supplement behind it to the so-called comprehensive biography (postulated, but probably never completed). It may turn out that there is no biography, but only biographies, fragments, ideas.



62 Schulz's music-related experiences described here include the activity of the Jewish artistic society “Kaleia”, numerous contacts with musicians, and finally his sound experiences during the Nazi occupation. Schulz's sonic “biography” was certainly much more extensive and research on it deserves to be continued.

Jakub Orzeszek: Schulz and Mourning. About the Writer's Second Body

The ethics of necrography

Talking about death in Schulz – about a death that will be “insinuated rather than represented”¹ in his work – is something completely different than talking about Schulz's death. The former is suggested in various ways, mediated in metaphors or the emotional aura of the fragment, and is revealed in more or less “hypnagogic, imageless hallucinations”². Its domain is aesthetics. The discourse about it constantly teeters on the verge of silence, but sometimes – as it seems to me – you can capture the impression of its presence for a moment through literature and art (although I do not know if there are general “principles of the aesthetics of death”, which Michel Guiomar wrote so inspiringly about). This second kind of death hits the body directly. It touches on a specific biography, has a date on the calendar, happens here and now. Its literal, irreversible factuality, as well as its corporeality and materiality, move the speaker much more into the realm of ethics – they make it easier to slip beyond the measure of appropriateness, into the appropriating violence of language or “obscenity of understanding”³, in the textual subordination of the deceased. This death requires a different kind of responsibility for words.

The first is inexpressible as an idea and therefore poses – or at least can pose – a particular challenge to style and imagination. The second one is inexpressible as an annihilating event that destroys references to meaning, “rapes the idea”⁴ and

1 In this way I have tried to approach the topic in *Śmierć (3). Antyhasło do "Słownika schulzowskiego"*, “Schulz/Forum” 10, 2017, p. 85–111. The present text is an extended version of the paper presented on November 17, 2018 during the 3rd Schulz Days in Gdańsk. It would never take this form if it were not for the discussion and valuable comments of Jerzy Kandziora, Urszula Makowska, Małgorzata Ogonowska, Józef Olejniczak, Hanela Palkova and Stanisław Rosiek, to whom I am grateful for their views.

2 M. Guiomar, *Principes d'une esthétique de la mort*, Paris: Corti, 1988; Polish translation: idem, *Zasady estetyki śmierci*, przeł. T. Swoboda, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, wybór i oprac. S. Rosiek, Gdańsk 2010, p. 82.

3 See C. Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding. An Evening with Claude Lanzmann”, in: *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. C. Caruth, Baltimore 1995, especially p. 201–209.

4 Stanisław Cichowicz's definition: “Śmierć: gwałt na idei lub reakcja życia”, in: *Antropologia śmierci. Myśli francuska*, wybrali i przeł. S. Cichowicz, J. M. Godzimirski, Warszawa 1993.

demands restraint from the speaker, because reading experiences and intellectual ambitions are irrelevant when one is talking about it.

Now it is the latter death that is of interest to me. I will inquire to what extent a series of tragic negative events – Schulz's death in the Holocaust and the destruction of his body – had an impact on the reception of his writing. Not so much on interpretations of his work (or at least not only of it⁵), but especially on the posthumous legend, elements of which keep returning – with almost paradigmatic force – in biographical discourses about Schulz and in literary and artistic references to his life and work. At the same time, I am aware of the dangers: universalization, banality, fabulation, “sanctimonious talk”⁶ that are associated with a subject matter formulated in this way. And I am not at all sure that by talking about Schulz's death as part of an academic debate, I am not involuntarily committing one of those transgressions that are considered ethically discouraging in Holocaust research. Of course, my intention was different.

I believe that a critical reflection on the models of commemorating Schulz, as well as on the specific narrative styles established in Schulzology, is necessary – if only to understand how much Schulzology, from the very beginning, was marked by the lack of properly experienced mourning. Mourning after the Holocaust on the one hand, and the personal mourning of Jerzy Ficowski and his correspondents on the other – the mourning described in letters sent to him after the war by witnesses of Schulz's life. This correspondence determined the content and, which is equally important, the rhetorical form of *Regions of the Great Heresy*⁷.

I admit that I feel some discomfort related to the overrepresentation of this model, which turns the figure of Schulz and his biography into an object of mournful cult. Unlike Janusz Rudnicki, however, I do not want to provoke or

5 See J. Olejniczak, “Dyskurs Zagłady – przed i po... (Wittlin, Wat, Schulz)”, in: idem, *Pryncypia i marginesy Schulza*, Gdańsk 2019, where the author writes that “the intensification of the ‘discourse of the Holocaust’ and the increasingly ‘tangled’ structure of the grand narrative about the Holocaust resulted in the interwar texts of Schulz – though not only them – being ‘absorbed’ by this discourse, and began to co-create this great story” (p. 138); and idem, *Powroty w śmierć*, Katowice 2009, p. 45–83.

6 T. W. Adorno, *Dialektyka negatywna*, przeł. K. Krzemieniowa, przy współpracy S. Krzemienia-Ojaka, Warszawa 1986, s. 507. On the ethics of scientific and literary writing about the Holocaust, a fundamental problem in Holocaust studies, see, among others, J. Leociak, *Tekst wobec Zagłady. O relacjach z getta warszawskiego*, Toruń 2016; idem, *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji*, Warszawa 2009; A. Ubertowska, *Holokaust. Auto(tanato)grafie*, Warszawa 2014; eadem, *Świadectwo, trauma, głos. Literackie reprezentacje Holokaustu*, Kraków 2007; *Reprezentacje Holokaustu*, wybór i oprac. J. Jarniewicz, M. Szuster, Warszawa 2014; *Stosowność i forma. Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?*, red. M. Głowiński, K. Chmielewska, K. Makaruk, A. Molisak, T. Żukowski, Kraków 2005; A. H. Rosenfeld, *Podwójna śmierć. Rozważania o literaturze Holokaustu*, przeł. B. Krawcowicz, Warszawa 2003.

7 On the rhetoric of *The Regions of the Great Heresy* and more: J. Kandziora, *Poeta w labiryncie historii. Studia o pisarskich rolach Jerzego Ficowskiego*, Gdańsk 2017.

to burn bridges. His two sketches from the series *Listy z Hamburga* [*Letters from Hamburg*] (episode seven and eight), published in "Twórczość" in 1992 – in the context of the hundredth anniversary of Schulz's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of Schulz's death – were openly directed against the "sacral"⁸ aspect of Ficowski's writing. They attacked the "hagiographic" story about Schulz's execution, parodying it in a bold, but also utilitarian, brutal, and perhaps even showy way. My proposal is different and – I hope – is situated beyond these antagonisms. Without forgetting about them or the difficult emotions that are embedded in them, I will try to look at the topics outlined here from the perspective of thanatology or necrohumanities. The purpose of this shift, both methodological and linguistic, is to recognize and name several problematic nodes which the future necrography of Schulz will have to address.

And such a necrography should certainly be written someday. Who knows, maybe it should be written now, in parallel with the biography of the author of *The Street of Crocodiles*, as its complement, because "only both of them together encompass the entirety of [...] posthumous existence"⁹. To make this possible, first of all, it is necessary to reconstruct the text of the end of Schulz's biography. It is this text that "blows up the framework of biographical discourse"¹⁰ and is also the first point of reference for all necrographic narratives.

November 19, 1942, before 12:00

Information about Schulz's death has been preserved thanks to witness accounts and stories from outsiders. However, these are often contradictory narratives, written down after many years, distorted by memory gaps or, contrarily, deeply emotional, affected by the trauma of loss or martyrdom. Today, they are often unverifiable.

The most complete attempt to unite this polyphony was presented by Jerzy Ficowski in three texts¹¹, published during the thirty years 1956–1986. At the

8 Rudnicki's attitude to Ficowski's style is best illustrated by the metaphor of a tree whose branches are bending under the weight of rotting fruit: "They are too sweet, bland and suspiciously pretty. A good kick would be the only salvation for this tree that grew out of sacred admiration. With some momentum, straight into the trunk. Everything that has faded would fall down, the branches freed from the burden of pathos would go up" – J. Rudnicki, *List z Hamburga* (8), "Twórczość" 1992, nr 10, p. 86.

9 S. Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 110.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

11 In the article *Przypomnienie Brunona Schulza* ("Życie Literackie" 1956, no. 6), in the final chapter of *Regions of the Great Heresy* (first edition 1967) and in the essay "Przygotowania do podróży" from the volume *Okolice Sklepów cynamonowych* (1986). The discourse of these three texts was discussed by Marcin Romanowski in the article *Śmierć Schulza*, "Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Poetica" 2016, no. 4, p. 82–101.

same time, the attempt is not free from a personal writing conception and literary procedures related to it, for example, coherence, arbitrary selection of content, and fictionalization. A critical reading of the sources on which Ficowski relied shows the shimmering nature of this message. It is therefore possible that it is here – in the chaos of discourses, in unverifiable, parallel variants, and not in the literary order of narrative – that the nightmare, but also the polyphonic truth of this death, is revealed.

There is no doubt about the date and place of the event – Bruno Schulz was shot on November 19, 1942 at the intersection of ul. Czackiego and ul. Mickiewiczza, opposite the Judenrat (about a hundred meters from his former family home at the Market Square), in the campaign of murdering Jews, after which the inhabitants of Drohobych later called that day “Black Thursday”. It is estimated that from one hundred¹² (estimation by Michał Chajes) to two hundred and thirty¹³ (Samuel Rothenberg) people died in the Drohobych ghetto and the direct pretext for the Gestapo operation was the previous day’s brawl, as a result of which the Jewish pharmacist Kurtz-Reines, defending himself against arrest, injured SS-man Karl Hübner in the finger. Panic broke out. According to Ficowski’s findings, the attackers started shooting at passers-by without warning, “ran behind those escaping to the gates of houses, killed those hiding in staircases and apartments”¹⁴. Schulz was nearby, probably on his way to the Judenrat to buy food. Izydor Friedman (Tadeusz Lubowiecki), a friend of the writer and witness of his death, recalls: “A gestapo man Günther caught Schulz, who was physically weaker, and then held him down, and put a revolver to his head and shot him twice”¹⁵.

Most often, it is believed that the identity of the murderer is certain: SS-Scharführer Karl Günther appears in many independent accounts, including those by Emil Górski, Leopold Lustig, Alfred Schreyer and Abraham Schwarz. Moreover, the view became established that Schulz’s death was a kind of revenge on another Gestapo officer, Schulz’s protector, Feliks Landau, who had previously shot Günther’s protégé – a dentist, Mr Löw (Ficowski’s version¹⁶) or the carpenter Mr Hauptman (Lustig’s version, quoted by Henryk Grynberg¹⁷). Günther

12 Michał Chajes’ letter to Jerzy Ficowski from June 18, 1948 is in the Jerzy Ficowski archive in the National Library (Korespondencja Jerzego Ficowskiego, tom 4: C, III 14533). Quoted in: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje*, oprac. J. Kandzióra, Gdańsk.

13 S. Rothenberg, *List o zagładzie Żydów w Drohobyczu*, wstęp, opracowanie i przypisy E. Silberner, Londyn 1984, p. 13.

14 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 506.

15 List Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana) do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 23 czerwca 1948 roku, “Schulz/Forum” 7, 2016, p. 207.

16 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 220.

17 H. Grynberg, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, Warszawa 1997, p. 35.

would later boast publicly to Landau: "I've shot your Jew!"¹⁸. However, it must be said that there is at least one more version that does not confirm this account. It is included in the reports from the Holocaust written by surviving Jews from Drohobych in 1946, 1947 and 1958 at the Historisches Institut in Israel in Haifa. All witnesses – Chaim Patrych, Moses Marcus Wiedmann, Theodora Reifler and Josef Weissmann – claim that Schulz's murderer was not Günther, but Friedrich Dengg, a Gestapo man whose name Ficowski ignores for some reason, even though he had these sources in his archives¹⁹. The testimony contained in these reports also add several other differences to Ficowski's narrative. However, these accounts are inconsistent in some details and may be why they were considered unreliable by the biographer.

There is no certainty about the time of the incident. Emil Górski, a former student, and later a friend of Schulz's, claims that he saw him before noon, when he visited him at the Gärtnerei workplace in ul. Św. Jana. "The news of Schulz's death reached me very quickly, maybe an hour after he left me"²⁰ – he declared in 1982, which would mean that the writer died around 11:00 or 12:00 am. Another participant in the events, Alfred Schreyer – supported by Abraham Schwarz – argues against this, and claims the "wild action" of the Gestapo began much earlier, certainly before 9 am, and Schulz could have been murdered "even before eight o'clock"²¹. I find a similar chronology in Adela Hilzenrad's diary, kept from June 1941 to August 1944. The author, who was hiding outside the ghetto

18 "Requiem. Alfred Schreyer i Abraham Schwarz rozmawiają o śmierci Brunona Schulza", in: M. Kitowska-Lysiak, *Schulzowskie marginalia*, Lublin 2007, p. 146. Schulz's fatal involvement in the rivalry between Gestapo men, even if it may seem unbelievably confabulated, appears in several independent and early testimonies. After the war, it became one of the most enduring elements of the writer's posthumous legend and has been processed as a "biographeme" many times in both artistic and historical-literary interpretations of his biography.

19 Dengg's name does not appear even once in Ficowski's work. It is mentioned in Alfred Schreyer's conversation with Abraham Schwarz, but in a completely different context – not as the name of Schulz's murderer, but as Schwarz's "good Gestapo man" and "protector" (*Requiem*, p. 145–147). In Budzyński's book, Dengg is included in the list of Gestapo men from Drohobych, but this author also claims Schulz's murderer was undoubtedly Karl Günther – W. Budzyński, *Miasto Schulza*, Warszawa 2005, p. 416. The archives at Yad Vashem contain an indictment against Dengg and the remaining Gestapo men from Drohobych for "murdering the population in a cruel way" and organizing "actions against Jews", but without specifying the date of November 19, 1942. See Yad Vashem Documents Archive, M.9 – Jewish Historical Documentation Center, Linz (Simon Wiesenthal Collection), File Numbers: 46, 812, <https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=global&strSearch=Friedrich%20Dengg&GridItemId=3685799> (retrieved: 9.04.2019).

20 B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty, wspomnienia o pisarzu*, oprac. J. Ficowski, Kraków–Wrocław 1984, p. 75. The typescript of the sketch, signed by Emil Górski with the date: "November 1982", is in Jerzy Ficowski's archives in the National Library (Korespondencja Jerzego Ficowskiego, volume 7: Goł – Gwa, III 14546). Cited after: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków*.

21 *Requiem*, p. 148.

in Drohobych on the day of Schulz's death, wrote that the shooting lasted from about 8 to 11 am – and it was provoked by Günther and Landau²².

Reports about the alleged escape from Drohobych, supposedly planned by Schulz for November 19, are also unclear. Researchers tend to agree that Schulz could have had false Aryan documents (*Kennkarte*) at that time – someone from the writer's circles in Warsaw could have organized the papers (maybe the underground activist Tadeusz Szturm de Sztrem²³ or Zofia Nałkowska²⁴) and they were probably delivered to Schulz from Lviv by the Home Army²⁵. Another version is given by Harry Zeimer, a former student of Schulz, according to whom documents were organized for Schulz by Tadeusz Wójtowicz, a friend from Drohobych, associated with the resistance movement²⁶. The writer had probably been planning for several months to travel to Warsaw, as is suggested by, for example, the efforts he made in 1942 to secure the manuscripts and drawings, and by the account of Zeimer, who testified at Landau's trial that some time before his death ("at the last minute"²⁷) Schulz "gave up escaping with them"²⁸. Ficowski believes Emil Górski, who remembered that on the day of the shooting, Schulz was ready to leave and visited him just to say goodbye²⁹. On the other hand, Izidor Friedman does not confirm this belief. On the contrary, he describes Schulz at the time as a broken man, deprived of hope for survival and of any will to live – someone delaying escape and unable to take any action.



22 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Collections, Hilzenrad family papers, Diary 1941–1944, Box 2 / Folder 1, Accession Number: 2011.278.1, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn44069> (access: 8.04.2019).

23 *List Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana) do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 23 czerwca 1948 roku*, p. 207.

24 J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 85.

25 However, the accounts of Kazimierz Truchanowski – who many years after claimed that, as a forger in Spała, he was the main initiator and coordinator of Schulz's rescue operation – seem unreliable. See K. Truchanowski, "Spotkania z Schulzem", in: *Przymierzanie masek. In 100. rocznicę urodzin Kazimierza Truchanowskiego*, pod red. Z. Chlewińskiego, Płock 2004, p. 30–31, as well as critical letter by Jerzy Ficowski, quoted in the article by Jerzy Jarzębski *Komentarz do komentarzy: Schulz edytorów*, "Schulz/Forum" 3, 2013, p. 105–111.

26 A. Grupińska, *Śmierć Brunona Schulza. O "czarnym czwartku" w Drohobyczu opowiada Harry Zeimer – uczeń i przyjaciel Schulza*, "Życie" 2001, nr 98, p. 14. Reprint of the conversation published in "Czas Kultury" 1990, no. 13–14.

27 Quoted in: J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 220.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Artur Sandauer had a radically different attitude to Schulz's escape. For years he argued that Schulz not only did not plan to leave that day, but was actually looking for death, and Günther's murder was in fact the writer's suicide committed by someone else. However, Sandauer based his views on this subject not on the basis of testimonies, but on his own interpretation of Schulz's work for, in which he saw primarily a masochistic drive towards self-destruction, understood quite literally. See A. Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1982, p. 36–37, where he formulates the above judgments in the most direct way. Sandauer's statements contributed to the intensification of the dispute between him and Ficowski.

Schulz's body lay in the street for almost 24 hours³⁰. However, the circumstances of the writer's burial remain unclear. Jerzy Ficowski and Wiesław Budzyński accept the testimony of Friedman, who in a letter to Ficowski from 1948 declares that the morning after the shooting he buried Schulz in the old Jewish cemetery in Drohobych³¹. This would agree with the account of Abraham Schwarz, who – as a member of the group collecting bodies on the orders of the Germans – remembered that the gravediggers did not move the dead Schulz because “someone was about to come, he just went to get a cart in which he wanted to transport Schulz's body to the old cemetery [and bury it next to his mother – J.O.]”³². Jerzy Jarzębski expressed a different opinion. He supported the account of Leopold Lustig, who claimed that he had also participated in “clearing” the ghetto of the dead. According to him, Schulz's body was transported together with others to the new Jewish cemetery and buried there together with the body of the carpenter Hauptman (Günther's protégé). Lustig even remembered the place: “They were lying near the wall, from the entrance to the right, and there we buried them in one grave”³³. There is at least one more version of these events, repeated by Budzyński after the Drohobych teacher of Polish, Dora Kacnelson, but due to the lack of similar testimonies it is impossible to assess her credibility. Kacnelson knew a certain Hauptman (not a carpenter), who, many years after the war, allegedly claimed that, together with other Judenrat employees, he had buried Schulz's body – almost three days (!) after the shooting – in a mass grave opposite the synagogue, next to the old Jewish cemetery³⁴.

However, regardless of which account of the events we consider true, we must state clearly that Schulz's actual burial place remains unknown. The old Jewish cemetery no longer exists. A housing estate was built in its place in the 1950s. The new Jewish cemetery, now devastated, is covered with wild grass and bushes.

The materiality of metaphor

Negative metaphors through which twentieth-century thanatology conceptualized death, such as “rupture”, “fracture”, “trap of non-existence”, “aggression of

30 As evidenced by accurate and consistent accounts, among others by Ignacy Kriegel (H. Grynberg, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, p. 35), Abraham Schwarz (*Requiem*, p. 149) or that of Bohdan Odynak, who describes the scene of robbing Schulz's corpse of the watch (*ibidem*, p. 150–151).

31 Letter from Tadeusz Lubowiecki to Jerzy Ficowski of June 23, 1948, p. 207–208.

32 *Requiem*, p. 149.

33 H. Grynberg, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

34 W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, Warszawa 2013, p. 16.



Alleged place of burial of Bruno Schulz at the Jewish cemetery in Drohobych, photo by Jerzy Jarzębski

rot”³⁵, “revelation of the pain of existence”³⁶, “emptiness that breaks into the fullness of life”³⁷, “hour of absurdity”, “scandal”³⁸, become crudely literal here. At the same time, they are insufficient, despite all the brutality they evoke, even despite the undoubted connections between this way of conceptualizing death and the experience of the “slaughter of great wars”³⁹ (Ariès writes about the experience of a “foul death”), in whose shadow the first generation of thanatologists in Europe was formed. The murder of Schulz goes beyond the act of a street execution – it also concerns the posthumous fate of the body that his murderers first sentenced to humiliating exposure, and ultimately to annihilation in the unknown (most likely mass) grave. This is perhaps the most radical and hateful form of necroviolence⁴⁰, which – for the Jewish tradition, as well as for the broadly understood Western culture – is constituted by the instrumental removal of a body or grave equivalent to the intention to remove the trace of somebody’s existence – something Holocaust researchers, as if tautologically, call “necroicide”⁴¹, killing a dead one. There is nothing metaphorical about this tautology, there is only the dull horror of the act.

Schulz ≠ Mickiewicz

“Matter – even a shred of it, a small remnant, even a handful of dust – is indispensable for the dead’s activity in history. Thanks to it, the dead maintain their ties with the world and enter into new relationships with the living, who – yes, they do! – assign a considerable sovereignty to the deceased. Material remains (corpse, coffin, grave, things belonging to the dead) replace the body annihilated by death”⁴². The author of these words and the originator of the genre of necrography, Stanisław Rosiek, writes further about the “great transformation” of the deceased, referring to many symbolic practices through which the living try to

35 L.-V. Thomas, *Trup. Od biologii do antropologii*, przeł. K. Kocjan, Łódź 1991, p. 5.

36 M. Vovelle, “Historia ludzi w zwierciadle śmierci”, in: idem, *Śmierć w cywilizacji Zachodu. Od roku 1300 po współczesność*, przeł. T. Swoboda, M. Ochab, M. Sawiczewska-Lorkowka, D. Senczyszyn, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2008, p. 45.

37 V. Jankélévitch, *Tajemnica śmierci i zjawisko śmierci*, przeł. S. Cichowicz, J. M. Godzimirski, in: *Antropologia śmierci*, p. 45.

38 Ibidem, p. 59.

39 P. Ariès, *Człowiek i śmierć*, przeł. E. Bąkowska, Warszawa 1992, p. 559.

40 I borrow the term “necroviolence” from the American anthropologist Jason De León. According to his definition, it is “violence committed through special treatment of a corpse, perceived by the perpetrator and/or the victim (and the cultural groups they represent) as derogatory, sacrilegious, or inhuman” – J. De León, *The Land of Open Graves. Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, photographs by Michael Wells, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015, p. 69. See also J. Orzeszek, *Nekroprzemoc? Polityka, kultura i umarli*, “Twórczość” 2019, no. 5, p. 82–92.

41 E. Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała*, Warszawa 2017, p. 191.

42 S. Rosiek, op. cit., p. 57.

familiarize themselves with the irreversibility of separation, as well as to obscure the nothingness, Bataille's *informe*, into which corpses turn through thanatomorphosis. The great transformation therefore reduces the biological and semiotic crisis caused by death – it fills “the sudden gap in discourse”⁴³. The corpse, the “*outr-signifiant*”⁴⁴, as Louis-Vincent Thomas calls it after Jean-Thierry Maertens, returns to the order of discourse as “a place of convergence of many phantasms”⁴⁵.

This is done in two related symbolical procedures: “once by doubling the corpse, once by transforming it”⁴⁶, through the imagination and transformation of a dead body. The first practice involves creating images, likenesses, and representations of the deceased, which preserve his character *in effigie*. “Thanks to them, something like a “second” being is created”⁴⁷ – another body-image, not susceptible to the laws of biological decomposition, transferred to the realm of imagination and imaginings. “*Effigie*, taking the place of the mortal remains of the dead, takes over his functions, his properties and his dignity”⁴⁸. The second action directly involves matter and leads to the transformation of a dead body into a mourning object. This transformation begins when the body is ritually prepared for the burial ceremony and ends with the hiding of them in the grave and replacing them with a material signifier: a tombstone, a monument, a hand cast, a death mask. The key role is played by the grave, which – as the French thanatologist Jean-Didier Urbain writes – “hides the corpse and its inevitable physical and chemical future”. It is “the semiotic face of what is hidden by [...] a sign of affirmation, a positive sign, because – perceived phenomenologically (from the point of view of a person in mourning) – it allows us to be convinced of its full and unchanging referentiality, which is signalled by its very existence, allows an illusory idea to materialize, produces the effect of ‘somaticity’ or at least a presence that frees us from emptiness, from the sense of loss, from meaninglessness”⁴⁹.

The necrographer's task should be to trace both the material and symbolic history of the dead body, as well as to critically describe the “great transformation” – the process of re-building the bond between the dead and the living. However, it is clearly visible that Schulz's necrography would have to differ significantly from Mickiewicz's necrography, which was the subject of Stanisław Rosiek's studies. Indeed, the posthumous fate of the “Great Poet” and “Great Pole” could be

43 L.-V. Thomas, op. cit., p. 52.

44 Ibidem.

45 Ibidem, p. 51.

46 S. Rosiek, op. cit., p. 202.

47 Ibidem, p. 203.

48 Ibidem, p. 205.

49 J.-D. Urbain, “W stronę historii Przedmiotu Funeralnego”, przeł. M. L. Kalinowski, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, p. 322–323.

considered the opposite of the fate of Schulz. They are different in almost every respect. Not only in the moment and circumstances of death, but also in the models of existence they embodied. The biography of the former was already very public during his lifetime. It was a biography of the “hero of Poles”, and after his death it naturally became part of the mythologized and ideologized “narrative of the nation” (Homi Bhabha⁵⁰). The heroic and patriotic cult surrounding Mickiewicz’s remains should not be surprising. His necrographer can make use of a wealth of facts – both material (including the history of the body and then mourning objects, relics, souvenirs) and symbolic (including the discursive and political activity around the corpse and its representations).

Schulz’s biography – even though it was certainly not the biography of a “modest teacher from Drohobych” – was of a private nature, just like his work, which (unlike Mickiewicz’s) could not fit into the ideologies and expectations imposed on it by History⁵¹. In the posthumous legend, Schulz, as an artist and Holocaust victim, is surrounded by a martyrdom cult. In his case, however, this process of “symbolic recovery”⁵² was stopped. The unresolved experience of “ambiguous loss” weighs on him⁵³ – a loss that finds no support in matter and does not end in consolidation. Schulz’s necrography would differ, also methodologically, from Mickiewicz’s necrography, primarily because it would have to focus much more on tracing subsequent representations of the deceased *in effigie* and on the analysis of discourse. Schulz’s second body, the imagined and narrated body, exists not alongside but instead of – as a substitute for – the absent mourning object.

Deaths (after death)

It is significant that Jerzy Ficowski opens *Przypomnienie Brunona Schulza* from 1956 with an emotional, partly fictionalized description of the writer’s death. Not only this fragment, but the entire text, considered to be the beginning of post-war Schulzology, has the features of a “belated obituary”⁵⁴. At the same time, it completes Ficowski’s work, brings closure to it. The last edition of *Regiony wielkiej herezji* from 2002 has a motto that serves as an epitaph – the poem “Mój nieocalony” from the volume *Ptak poza ptakiem*, reprinted on the first page of this issue,

50 H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 155.

51 For which he was attacked, for example, by Kazimierz Wyka and Stefan Napierski.

52 J.-T. Maertens, “Nad otwartym grobem. Semiotyka zmarłego”, przeł. M. L. Kalinowski, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, p. 267.

53 See P. Boss, *Ambiguous Loss. Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

54 This fancy and accurate phrase was used by Marcin Romanowski during the conference at the 4th Schulz Days in Gdańsk in November 2019.

is like a lyrical tombstone placed for Schulz, but also a personal last will of the biographer, summarizing his many years of work. Between these two texts stretches almost half a century of searching for what “survived on scorched earth”⁵⁵, though it had been “doomed”⁵⁶ – all testimonies about Schulz, as well as his manuscripts and “existence archive”. Ficowski’s rescue mission also included commemorative activities.

In 1989, for example, in connection to the upcoming centenary of Schulz’s birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his death, the biographer tried unsuccessfully to lead to the funding of a symbolic tombstone for the writer in Warsaw. The monument, designed by Warsaw sculptor Marek Tomza, was to consist of two matzevahs, white and black, placed opposite each other. The first one was supposed to contain Schulz’s inverted lead autograph, the second one – a spherical mirror of black glass in which visitors could look at themselves against the background of Schulz’s actual signature⁵⁷.

However, many more such symbolic tombstones and epitaphs were placed for Schulz in the 20th – and are still added in the 21st century. An elegy to the tragic death of Schulz is probably the most common form of homage to the author of *The Street of Crocodiles* in literature, art, theatre, film, and music. A systematic description of these activities and artefacts, a critical characterization of them, from the most stereotypical representations and scenarios (Schulz as a defenceless Jew caught up in a rivalry between two Gestapo men) to the idiomatic ones (Schulz as a fish swimming away in the Baltic Sea) – is a task for a separate study. Several examples already show how large the research field is. One of the most famous and recognized obituary texts is undoubtedly Wojciech Jerzy Hass’s film *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* from 1973. The final scene – with the catabasis of Józef leaving the sanatorium, stumbling between countless tombstones and candles – is a reference to the Holocaust and gives the whole thing a mournful character. A less clear reference that is nevertheless predicated on necrological features can be found in Mirosław Bałka’s sculpture from 1982 entitled *Bruno Schulz*, in which a subtle analogy to the form of a death mask can be recognized. A peculiar (also because it teeters on the verge of kitsch) and less known example of Schulz’s literary obituary can be found in Włodzimierz Paźniewski’s essay collection *Życie i inne zajęcia*, also published in 1982. In the essay “Mesjasz na wakacjach w Truskawcu”, Paźniewski presents the writer’s last days in the convention of passion: Schulz

⁵⁵ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ Idem, “Wprowadzenie do *Księgi listów* do wydania z roku 2002”, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 8–15.

⁵⁷ J. Ficowski, *Pomnik Brunona Schulza*, „*Życie Warszawy*” 1989, nr 14, <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-lipca-1989> (retrieved: 21.12.2019). See documentation of Marek Tomza’s project, published in this issue of Schulz/Forum.



Jan Szczepan Szczepkowski, **Bruno Schulz**
Pretending to Be Dead, 2006, 130 × 140 cm,
oil on canvas, private property

has the face of Christ, Landau is Pilate, Günther plays the role of Judas. In the background, Schulz's lost novel *Messiah* adds some more pathos – Paźniewski compares the unfinished work to the author's brutally interrupted biography⁵⁸.

The funeral-elegiac tradition does not weaken even in the latest references to the work and life of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*. On the contrary. This is confirmed by Polish literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, not only Różewicz and his poem *W świetle lamp filujących* – but especially the poetry of authors born in the 1970s. For some of them, called by critics the poets of “emboldened imagination”, Schulz became both a literary patron and a “text” – a protagonist of their poems, whom they try to resurrect in various ways, but nevertheless always appearing in the shadow of his death (as in Radosław Kobierski's poems “Drohobycz” and “Śliwice” of 1999, Tomasz Różycki's *Zagłada wioski* of 2006, or Ewa Elżbieta Nowakowska's *Płachta śniegu* and *Nauczyciel robót ręcznych* of 2013). “The fact that Schulz's grave is missing, his remains cannot be found, despite the efforts made, inspires poets to show him as a ghost, an apparition, similar to a romantic revenant, or to include him in the realities of the world presented in his works, following the example of the projects contained in his prose to prolong the life of his father – turned into a bird, a worm or (a more innovatively) as an object in the environment – inconspicuous but distinguished by something special”⁵⁹ – writes Magdalena Rabizo-Birek. But at the same time, “it is impossible to work through this loss, this mourning, despite the passing of time”⁶⁰.

The same rule applies to responses in visual arts. In Jan Szczepkowski's painting from 2006, the Drohobych writer was depicted in a foetal position, on an empty street, with his face covered with his hands – this recognizable thanatic gesture was negated (though in fact only apparently, because the effect is rather the opposite) with the bitterly ironical title *Bruno Schulz pretends to be dead*. It is also worth mentioning two works from a project called *Bruno Schulz. Unnamed Artist* (2018) run by the Republika Marzeń Foundation. Both clearly refer to the circumstances of Schulz's death. The first one, by Paweł Althamer, entitled *Drzewo Schulz* [Schulz Tree], is a metal installation whose upper part, like a stripped tree crown, resembles the silhouette of a fallen man pierced with nail-thorns. Instead of leaves, there are soap mini-sculptures and fragments of brown sponge that imitate pieces of bread, studded into the structure. The author of the second work is Jerzy Kalina. His *W niebo stąpanie* [Stepping into Heaven], an installation originally

58 W. Paźniewski, *Życie i inne zajęcia*, Warszawa 1982, p. 123–138.

59 M. Rabizo-Birek, *Schulz poetów “ośmielonej wyobraźni” (preliminaria)*, “Schulz/Forum” 13, 2019, p. 80.-

60 Ibidem, p. 84. Interesting material in this respect is also provided by the 4th volume of the “Acta Schulziana” series from 2019, entitled *Bruno Schulz w poezji. Antologia otwarta*.



Mirosław Bałka, **Bruno Schulz**,
1982, photo by Janusz Fogler

placed in the Museum of Masovian Jews in Płock, consists of fourteen life-size figures of men, women, and children. Each of the figures, which together constitute an allegory of the victims of the Holocaust, holds a matzevah made of bread.

All these works and texts implement, as if following Ficowski, the saving *topos* of commemorating and making present the prematurely deceased writer – a victim of the Holocaust and necroicide. Despite the intentions of the torturers, commemorators try to pay tribute to him and... re-establish his lost somaticity. If you look at them from the perspective of anthropological investigation into mourning – they seem to participate in the cultural process of consolidation. They intend to create a kind of ritualized code that provides an outlet for chaos and disorder, thanks to which the aggressive charge is neutralized, and the self-destructive reality is replaced by a symbol⁶¹.

Does Schulz's death serve as a symbol, then? Jerzy Jarzębski drew attention to this normalising effect of funeral and martyrdom narratives about Schulz, at the same time noticing the danger of reductionism that is, contrarily to the intentions of their creators – inevitably connected to them. "At this point, Schulz's work merges for good with the writer's biographical legend, [...] Schulz-the-everyman also disappears; there remains a tormented Jew waiting for death". And further: "Schulz played both of these roles in his life, but – paradoxically – it was the latter that determined his international fame to a greater extent. As an artist and thinker, the Drohobych writer sets much higher requirements for his readers: he demands not only attention in reading and intelligence allowing them to associate and read various systems of signs, but also erudition allowing them to include in the process of receiving various literary and cultural contexts. As a Jew sentenced to death by the Nazi and trying, thanks to his painting talents, to postpone the inevitable execution, he requires mainly empathy"⁶².

Norman Ravvin writes in a similarly sceptical tone, analysing Schulz's posthumous presence in international literature, including the novels *The Messiah from Stockholm* by Cynthia Ozick, *See Under: Love* by David Grossman and *The Prague Orgy* by Philip Roth. Ravvin states that beyond the borders of Poland and beyond the reach of the Polish language, "Schulz's iconicity [...] arises largely from the grisly quality of that death, its status as a paradigmatic act of German violence against Jews in occupied eastern Europe"⁶³. "His face", writes Ravvin,

61 A. M. di Nola, *Tryumf śmierci. Antropologia żałoby*, przeł. M. Woźniak, R. Sosnowski, J. Kornecka, M. Surma-Gawłowska, M. Olszańska, Kraków 2006, p. 188.

62 J. Jarzębski, *Sklepy bławatne i sklepy cynamonowe*, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 2: *Sklepy cynamonowe*, wstęp i oprac. J. Jarzębski, dodatek krytyczny S. Rosiek, oprac. językowe M. Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2019, p. 17.

63 N. Ravvin, *Veneration and Desecration: The Afterlife of Bruno Schulz*, in: *Bruno Schulz: New Readings, New Meanings / Nouvelles lectures, nouvelles significations*, published under the direction of / publié sous la direction de S. Latek, Montreal–Cracow 2009, p. 61.

“is emblematic of the Holocaust”, regardless of the fact that the most frequently reproduced self-portrait is his *cliché-verre Dedication*, dated approximately 1920 (no self-portrait of the artist from the period after 1939 has survived).

In the imagination of the West, after his death, Schulz plays a role that is as if the opposite of Anne Frank's. While she “was transformed into the figure of a radiant young Holocaust saint, into the embodiment of a child's desire to live even in the face of terrible events, in a gracious announcement of the return of normality after the Holocaust”, Bruno Schulz as a counter-symbol of this consolation “must go down, again and again, to the murderer's bullet on the Drohobych street. In critical account after critical account, on book jacket after book jacket, in the prose of would-be acolytes, he is made to become his murder [...]”⁶⁴.

It is hard to disagree, at least to some extent, with Ravvin's concerns. Caught in a thanatic ritual, Schulz resembles one of those sad wax figures whose existence is sustained by “the habit [...] of exhibiting”. “All of them had hanging from their lips, dead like the tongue of a strangled man, a last cry”⁶⁵. I am reading this part of *Spring* and suddenly I am struck by the following phrase: the habit of representing mourning.

The writer's second body

However, I was wrong when I wrote that Schulz's necrographer must only rely on *effigies*. The material history of his body was not interrupted in November 1942. The posthumous body that exists beyond the lost grave are his works. Someone will say that in the end I give in to the “addiction to mourning”, seeking solace in apotheosis. That might be, indeed, the case. But I am not talking about Horatian survival in words and thanks to words. Because Schulz's body is not words that are more durable than those made of bronze, but sheets of paper, always ready to be removed, but nevertheless persisting by the power of some peculiar law of Odradek: manuscripts, drawings, graphics, official applications. How is this possible?

You just need to change your point of view, break away from the habitual oppositions: dead-living, inanimate-animate. Trust, instead, that there is transgression here – many transgressions in both directions. That the matter of Schulz's archive is not passive, but “takes on flesh” in contact with the researcher, comes to life, becomes an agent. “Wherever the crisis of the ‘real’ body appears, the power of necroperformance is released – the effects of a dead body mediated in material remains. Necroperformance does not ask about the subject – it is only

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 62. Emphasis – JO.

⁶⁵ B. Schulz, “Spring”, in: idem, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska, introduction by John Updike, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 59–60.

the remains and the remnants that affect the living. Necroperformance, therefore, documents what was unconscious, overlooked or pushed to the margins of political life and historical discourse in writing the history of the dead”⁶⁶. This is indeed Schulz’s second body, material and historical, which I did not recognize before – dismembered in archives, auctioned for tens of thousands of dollars, displayed in museums and art galleries, hidden by collectors like relics.

⁶⁶ D. Sajewska, *Nekroperformans. Kulturowa rekonstrukcja teatru Wielkiej Wojny*, Warszawa 2016, p. 38.

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Michał Paweł Markowski, "Schulz – pisarz jako filozof", *Schulz/Forum* 2013, nr 2, p. 7–14.

Stefan Chwin, "Dlaczego Bruno Schulz nie chciał być pisarzem żydowskim (o 'wymazywaniu' żydowskości w *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* i *Sklepiach cynamonowych*)", *Schulz/Forum* 2014, nr 4, p. 5–21.

Małgorzata Ogonowska, "Mężczyzna Bruno Schulz", *Schulz/Forum* 2019, nr 14, p. 150–167.

Stanisław Rosiek, "Odcięcie. Siedem fragmentów", *Schulz/Forum* 2016, nr 7, p. 25–64.

Paweł Dybel, "Masochizm Schulza i próg wstydu w słowie", *Schulz/Forum* 2016, nr 7, p. 5–24.

Piotr Sitkiewicz, "Bruno, syn Franciszka", *Schulz/Forum* 2020, nr 15, p. 5–25.

Tymoteusz Skiba, "Witold Gombrowicz i Bruno Schulz. Biografie równoległe", *Schulz/Forum* 2020, nr 16, p. 45–98.

Katarzyna Warska, "Dzieciństwo w biografii pisarza", *Schulz/Forum* 2020, nr 16, p. 5–22.

Aleksandra Skrzypczyk, "Próba biografii akustycznej Brunona Schulza", *Schulz/Forum* 2020, nr 16, p. 28–44.

Jakub Orzeszek, "Schulz i żałoba. O drugim ciele pisarza", *Schulz/Forum* 2019, nr 14, p. 168–185.

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Literary scholar, editor. She works at the Institute of Polish Studies at the University of Gdańsk and at the słowo/obraz terytoria publishing house. She is member of the editorial board of “Schulz/Forum”. She has written *Schulz w kanonie. Recepcja szkolna w latach 1945–2018* (Gdańsk 2021). In September 2023, she defended her doctoral thesis *Bruno Schulz idzie do szkoły. Biografia tematyczna*.

Michał Paweł Markowski (born 1962)

Lecturer, literary theorist, historian of ideas, translator, essayist, columnist. Since 2010, head of the Department of Polish, Russian and Lithuanian Studies and the Department of Polish Language and Literature at the University of Illinois in Chicago. Research Professor at the Jagiellonian University, where until 2010 he worked as the founder and director of the The Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (CASH). Co-editor of two publishing series, *Horyzonty nowoczesności* (Universitas) oraz *Hermeneia* (Wydawnictwo UJ). Expert of the European Research Council (Brussels) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (Washington, DC). Author of monographs devoted to Gombrowicz, Schulz, Leśmian, Nietzsche and Derrida, eight essay collections (including *Dzień na ziemi*, composed of pieces of a novel, travel essays and photographs of the author), three traveler’s notebooks (on America, India, and Andalusia), and a political-academic trilogy on the state of contemporary humanities (*Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki; Wojny nowoczesnych plemion. Spór o rzeczywistość w epoce populizmu; Polska, rozkosz, uniwersytet. Opowieść edukacyjna*). Winner of the following awards: the Kościelski Award, the Kazimierz Wyka Award, Alexander Brückner Award, “Literatura na Świecie” Award and the Prize of the Minister of National Education, as well as the “Master” Scholarship of the Foundation for Polish Science. He has been the

Artistic Director of the Joseph Conrad International Literature Festival since 2008. He lives in Oak Park, Illinois.

Jakub Orzeszek (born 1991)

He is interested in thanatology, literary anthropology and popular music. Editor of *Nekroprzemoc. Polityka, kultura i umarli* (with Stanisław Rosiek, 2022). He has also published *Drugie ciało pisarza. Eseje o Brunonie Schulzu* (2023). He works at the Department of Literary Theory and Art Criticism at the University of Gdańsk.

Stanisław Rosiek (born 1953)

Literary historian, essayist and publisher, professor at the Institute of Polish Studies of the University of Gdańsk. With Maria Janion, he co-edited three volumes of the “Transgresje” book series (*Galernicy wrażliwości*, 1981; *Osoby*, 1984; *Maski*, 1986). He has dealt with literary criticism. Together with Stefan Chwin, he wrote the book *Bez autorytetu. Szkice* (1981), for which they received the Kościelski Award. He is the co-founder of *słowo/obraz terytoria*, a publishing house he has been managing as editor-in-chief (and later also as president) since 1995. As part of his scholarly work, he wrote on the posthumous cult of Adam Mickiewicz (books: *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety*, 1997, *Mickiewicz (po śmierci)*, 2016). He has also studied the works of several twentieth-century writers (Peiper, Schulz, Białoszewski) and done critical editorial work (a six-volume edition of Sławomir Mrożek’s drawings, 1998–2001). In 2002, he published the anthology *Wymiary śmierci*, and in 2008 his own book of essays [*nienapisane*], followed in 2010 by a volume of “political essays” *Władza słowa*. For several years, as part of the Schulz Research Lab he created, he has been dealing mainly with the works of Bruno Schulz. A preparation for this work was *Słownik schulzowski* published in 2002 (in cooperation with Włodzimierz Bolecki and Jerzy Jarzębski). Currently, he is the publisher of Schulz’s *Collected Works* and the editor-in-chief of “Schulz/Forum”, a journal published since 2012. In 2021, he published *Odcięcie*, a book that collects his writing on the life and work of Bruno Schulz.

Piotr Sitkiewicz (born 1980)

Editor and literary scholar. He teaches editing at the University of Gdansk. Author of two books on the pre-war reception of Bruno Schulz’s work, a book on the journalism of Antoni Słonimski, and articles on Schulz’s prose and the Polish school of graphic design.

Tymoteusz Skiba (born 1987)

An independent schulzologist, an unfulfilled basketball player and a would-be StarCraft player. A false prophet of the *sepr.online* music collective who published his achievements with Radio Kapitał. He holds a PhD in humanities, and is in love with science fiction, the interwar period, and double Hawaiian pizza. The most famous bard of Jasień, Kokoszki and Szadółki, hated in Stogi and Biskupia Górka. Imprisoned for centuries in the ŁAŻNIA Center for Contemporary Art in Gdańsk. He has published short stories in “Schulz/Forum”, “Bliza”, “Czas Kultury”, “Strona Czynna”, “Drobiazgi”, “Gdańsk Miasto LiteratURY”, “Tlen Literacki” and “Bravo Girl”. In 2020, he was awarded a distinction in

the 2nd National Literary Book Competition New Text Document in the prose category, for his short stories *Kto napisał Brunona Schulza?* and *Rozmowy ze spamem*. The author of the worst-selling book in the history of Szadółki entitled *Worstseller* (Słowa na Wybiegu, Gdańsk 2022).

Aleksandra Skrzypczyk (born 1990)

She holds a PhD in humanities. She is a literary scholar and a schulzologist. She has published in, among others, "Teksty Drugie", "Pamiętnik Literacki", "Przegląd Humanistyczny", "Przestrzenie Teorii". She is the author of the book *Muzyka i literatura w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym. Studium komparatystyczne*. She has studied the musical reception of Schulz after 1945 for *The Calendar of the Life, Work and Reception of Bruno Schulz*. Member of the Schulz Research Lab. Singer.

[abstracts]

Piotr Millati

Was Bruno Schulz a Writer?

The essay is an analysis of the most important, yet actually quite sporadic artistic adventure of Schulz, which was fiction writing. The question discussed is apparently paradoxical: was Bruno Schulz a writer? The author argues that there is a difference between a writer and a man of letters, i.e. someone who is a professional in the literary field. Schulz never became the latter and this is what makes his biography significantly different from those of the typical literati among whom he had many friends. In comparison to them, Schulz wrote very little, started writing quite late, and the period when he really was a writer lasted only several years. One might say that writing fiction indeed rather happened to him – it was not a permanent disposition of his artistic existence. That had crucial consequences for the form of his writing.

Michał Paweł Markowski

Schulz – Writer as Philosopher

Bruno Schulz has been one of the most important Polish philosophers. It is not because one can find in his works many traces of reading philosophy or that they convey any specific philosophical ideas, but because the form of his world is one of the most interesting world forms found in Polish in the 20th century. What is the meaning of this form? Our life tends to assume fixed shapes whose durability denies it since there is a radical asymmetry between the matter of life and the forms it adopts. We need these forms to deny formless chaos but we should not accept them as ultimate. Our nature knows no peace but adopts many disguises and roles to find the best possible shelter, which never ends with success. Human life is permanently incomplete because it always shows us its “eternal otherness.” Never will we realize our potential in full, which does not mean that we should limit ourselves in advance. On the contrary – the more options we have, the better our life is. If reality is a sum of realized potentialities, the more of them become real, the more meaning reality will acquire. And the more meaning it has, the more effort must be put in its interpretation. Thus human existence can be defined as interpreting. Interpretation adds more possibilities to being since it is not a way of knowing the world, but that of being in it.

Stefan Chwin

Why Bruno Schulz Did Not Want to Be a Jewish Writer: On the “Erasing” of Jewishness in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and *The Cinnamon Shops*

The absence of the Drogobych synagogue in Bruno Schulz’s fiction suggests his strategy of erasing all the traces of his cultural identity. Next to that absence, one can notice his significant choice of names – to realize that, it is enough to compare Schulz’s short

stories with Julian Strykowski's novel, "Austeria". Apparently, Schulz eliminated from his represented world all Jewish connotations. His use of foreign words, borrowed from different languages, may be explained as an effort to make his fiction as cosmopolitan as possible. This refers not just to the represented reality, but to the very structure of Schulz's imagination and his linguistic sensibility. The writer did not renounce his Jewishness, but wanted it to be only one component of his fiction. Biblical references and the paraphernalia of the Jewish culture were to be just one piece in a multicultural narrative mosaic which tended toward universality.

Małgorzata Ogonowska

Bruno Schulz, the man

The paper is an attempt to shed light on Bruno Schulz as a man seen in a specific social and historical context. It is a kind of reconstruction of his (un)manliness. A starting point was an intuitive supposition that for Schulz being a ("real") man might have been a genuine ordeal and that few people actually perceived him as one. The reconstruction is based on testimonies, letters, and individual observations of the writer's colleagues and friends. They questioned those elements of Schulz's male identity which did not fit the accepted social model. The picture that has been revealed by a number of memories, distorting or exaggerating his actual features and attitudes under the influence of the stereotypes of the times, consists of at least six elements: (1) Schulz was an ugly weakling; (2) a sickly mamma's boy always in depression; (3) a sexual impotent, maniac, and pervert; (4) a sluggard and a schlemiel; (5) a parasite depending on his clever, socially prominent, and wealthy elder brother; and (6) a burden to the family that he should have supported. The author opposes that stereotype which, even though impressive in literary terms and well rooted in Schulz's biographical myth, significantly simplifies his picture and biography by reducing him to a caricature of a great but socially castrated artist. Paradoxically, what made Schulz an artist: his talent, sensitivity or perhaps even hypersensitivity, gentleness, shyness, a unique (maybe pretended?) sense of separation from reality, as well as deep insight in it somehow deprived him of manliness as defined by society and made him unmanly. On the other hand though, all those traits contributed to an explanation, a shield, and an alibi of the stereotypical unmanliness. Thus, sometimes some people were able to forgive him his weakness since after all he was an artist. But what if had been a shoemaker or, for that matter, a dealer in textile fabrics?

Stanisław Rosiek

A Cut-off. Seven Fragments

The text consists of seven fragments which in different ways refer to a central category of separation; in particular to masochism, one of its manifestations. First, however, separation reveals itself in an imaginary act of self-castration (in a dream), described by Schulz in a letter. This act locates the writer beyond the sexes, symbolically excludes him from biological support of the stream of life and directs to art. Schulz considered that irreversible passage from biological reproduction to artistic creation a grave sin. The masochistic separation became a topic of many graphic works and drawings in which the artist, as an icon of himself, paid homage to "la belle dame sans merci." His literary works are quite different – Schulz's fiction is marked by shame. The present essay demonstrates how the literary discourse of the Cinnamon Shops generates meaningful gaps.

Allusions and silence, all kinds of narrative suspension, were supplemented by Schulz with pictorial representations, according to a principle that what cannot be written about, may be drawn. Many of his graphic works are overt manifestoes of masochism. In the *Booke of Idolatry* these are emblematic representations, projections of the artist's own phantasms, based on the visual idiom of the times, while in the compulsive drawings from the 1930s the boundary between fantasy and reality blurs. Schulz's artistic operations are ostentatious. He never used any disguise, reporting on himself. He was a masochist, but what did it mean? Another fragment is an attempt to find out what it meant to be a masochist in Schulz's times, and how he defined himself in that context, particularly in an explicit statement made in a letter to a certain psychiatrist: "Creatively, I express this perversion in its loftiest, philosophically interpreted form as a foundation determining the total *Weltanschauung* of an individual in all its ramifications." The final fragment presents for the most part some hitherto unknown documents of Schulz's life, such as a police certificate of decency, men's second-hand reports on his masochism, and memories of women with whom the writer held various kinds of liaisons.

Paweł Dybel

Schulz's Masochism and the Word's Threshold of Shame

Masochism is deeply irrational: the masochistic subject can attain sexual bliss only when/ he has been tormented and humiliated. The essay reconstructs the sociohistorical context in which reflection on masochism has been developing. Drawing on psychoanalysis (-Freud, Lacan, Žižek), the author makes a distinction between Schulz's private masochism and that which is demonstrated in his fiction and graphic works. All the variants of Schulz's masochism reflect the problems of Polish Jews with assimilation, parodic references to courtly love (*fin' amors*), and those elements of the writer's biography which foreground shame that he felt as he was writing.

Piotr Sitkiewicz

Bruno, Son of Franz. Schulz and Kafka in the interwar Poland

Already the first reviewers of Bruno Schulz's exhibitions and stories compared him to Franz Kafka, pointing at clear resemblances of imagination and motifs. Those analogies were later noticed also by literary scholars who either tried to prove that Schulz was inspired by the work of the Prague writer, or – on the contrary – demonstrated that all the correspondences between their literary worlds were accidental or determined by the times. Analyzing the reception of Kafka and Schulz in Poland before World War II, and the arguments used by both parties, the author makes an attempt to establish whether Schulz was indeed Kafka's follower. It transpires that even though Schulz most likely knew Kafka's novels and stories already before 1926, and one may find a number of links connecting not only their works, but also biographies, in terms of their idiom and worldview the two writers were dramatically different. This, however, does not mean that there is no connection between them. On the contrary, the author realizes that it was actually Kafka who encouraged Schulz to write and ultimately made him an artist, so that Schulz's writing may be considered a kind of response addressed to his literary progenitor. The picture of Schulz as an imitator of Kafka was largely influenced by the first postwar critics of his work, who promoted it abroad and looked for analogies with that of another Jewish writer active at approximately the same time and in the same geographical area. The ultimate

step toward a firm belief in the literary affinity of Schulz and Kafka was made by Jerzy Ficowski who, even though he rejected analogies, created Schulz's legend using the same methods as Max Brod – with similar merits as well as errors.

Tymoteusz Skiba

Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz. *Parallel Biographies*

This article gives an account of the overlapping biographies of Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz. It frames the events which brought the two writers together with a discussion of their literary debuts in 1933, which preceded their first meeting, and the post-war memories of Gombrowicz, who kept reminiscing about his “deceased friend”. The author describes the meetings and conversations between Schulz and Gombrowicz that took place at the latter's apartment or in Zofia Nałkowska's salon, their joint undertakings, such as the publication of open letters in *Studio* magazine, and their battle with literary critics, whose spiteful comments and attacks were aimed at what they called “young literature”. The article presents testimonies of Gombrowicz and Schulz's mutual inspirations and interpretations, and discusses texts and events which echo their vigorous correspondence, mostly lost during the Second World War. This mosaic of dispersed facts and memories depicts a great friendship between two artists, who approached each other with curiosity and respect, but also with their typical penchant for self-irony. The idea of parallel biographies was born during the author's work on the research project *Calendar of the Life, Work, and Reception of Bruno Schulz*.

Katarzyna Warska

Childhood in the Biography of a Writer. The Case of Bruno Schulz

The author considers childhood as an element of a writer's biography, connected with the rest of his or her life in a complicated way. Under this approach, recounting the story of the writer's childhood is the biographer's duty, which he or she – striving to show the ‘truth’ – imposes on him- or herself, but does not necessarily fulfil. Biographers omit or reduce childhood for cultural reasons, based on the adopted convention, because of their own convictions, or simply due to the lack of sources. The author challenges all these reasons, arguing for the importance of childhood as a phase of human life.

Aleksandra Skrzypczyk

An Attempt at an Acoustic Biography of Bruno Schulz. Auditory Experiences

The article analyzes the potential sonic experiences of Bruno Schulz. The numerous references to music in his prose inspire questions about Schulz's attitude towards music. Based on the testimonies of his family and friends, it is impossible to determine Schulz's opinion on the art of sounds, or whether he was musical and what kind of music he listened to. The ‘acoustic biography’ presented here becomes a metaphor for Schulz's probable auditory experiences. Arranged in the chronological order, it respects the principles of probability, and is based on the historical and cultural context of 19th- and 20th-century Poland.

Jakub Orzeszek

Schulz and Mourning. On the Writer's Second Body

The paper addresses the problem of the mourning cult of Bruno Schulz. The presented approach is critical of its excess in the Schulzean biographical discourses as well as literary

and artistic references to his life and work, but it is by no means provocative like that of Janusz Rudnicki, who in the 1990s mocked the “hagiographic” idiom of Jerzy Ficowski. Analyzing archive records and testimonies, the author attempts to reconstruct the circumstances of Schulz’s death in possibly the minutest details. Comparing contradictory pieces of information with the official version made popular by Ficowski, he shows how profoundly it has been marked by the unperformed work of mourning over Schulz and the Holocaust – both the failed work of Ficowski himself and of his postwar correspondents whose letters determined the form of *The Regions of Great Heresy*. Using the idiom of thanatology and taking the role of a necrographer rather than that of a Schulz specialist, the author supposes that the dynamic of loss in the case of Schulz reaches far beyond the act of the writer’s execution on the street to include also the posthumous annihilation of his corpse and grave. This particular kind of necroviolence, perhaps the most hateful from the vantage point of the Jewish tradition and the heritage of Western culture in general, which consists in removing the material remains of the deceased has been called by Holocaust scholars “necrocide.” The absence of material traces and the “mourning objects” that usually help to cure the semiotic crisis which is death makes writers and artists commemorate Schulz with lyrical and artistic epitaphs. Their function is to restore the bodily identity of the dead person by creating his other body, told about and imagined in effigy, existing not beside but instead of the missing “mourning object.” However, the expansion of those elegiac narratives, particularly those produced outside Poland, often results in unintended reductionism. As a human being, writer, and artist, Schulz has been reduced in them to an emblem of the Holocaust, while such obituaries ignore the history of his archive. The other, historical and material body of the writer consists of his manuscripts, drawings, graphic works, and official documents. It exists, drawn and quartered, in archives, to be put up for auction for tens of thousands of dollars, exposed in museums and art galleries, and hoarded by collectors as precious relics.

www.schulzforum.pl

Located at this web address, *The Calendar of the Life, Work and Reception of Bruno Schulz* is available to readers since 2017. It has been a growing research project whose aim is to present Schulz's biography on the basis of archive materials (the known ones and the ones constantly opening to new discoveries), as well as to present verified sources in the form of an open, interactive calendar, where the chronologically organized entries make it possible to follow events and facts related to Schulz's life, observe his resonance with the events of the time, the voices of readers and critics, and learn about the history of the posthumous reception of his work.

The Schulz Calendar allows you to look at the artist from several perspectives:

From the perspective of his life, recreated from the surviving fragments, and arranged day by day into a surprisingly complete whole – life reconstructed from documents previously unknown to anyone or known only to individual people.

From the perspective of his images – the calendar collects all known images of Schulz, all his visual works (wherever possible, in new, colourful reproductions) as well as additional iconography, showing his broadly understood world: texts of friends and acquaintances, scans of articles, books or documents, photos of places and objects associated with him.

From the perspective of his work – texts in a new critical edition, which has been published successively since 2016 and already contains four volumes, as well as artistic work, available in high-quality scans.

From the perspective of the reception of his work, divided into two periods – the active period of his creative life (1920–1943) and the period of posthumous reception (1943–2021), containing all (even the smallest) references along with expert linguistic-literary commentary, woven into a network of mutual relations.

From the perspective of places – cities, streets, buildings that were important to Schulz.

From the perspective of people who knew Schulz, who had something interesting to say about him, with whom he came into contact (personally or through his work), and those who cut him off – possibly everybody who had even the slightest impact on his life or art.

From the perspective of sources – manuscripts, documents, letters, memoirs, journalistic, academic and literary texts, which are presented not only in high-quality scans, but also in text form, enabling further work on them.

From the perspective of paths – micro-narratives creating a more or less coherent narrative, ordered not chronologically, but thematically.

“Schulz/Forum” book series

With the support of the magazine, the latest books on Schulz by both Polish and foreign authors are published. The series contains the following:

1. Schulz. Między mitem a filozofią, red. Joanna Michalik, Przemysław Bursztyka, Gdańsk 2014.

This anthology shows a map of the philosophical works Schulz might have been influenced by while creatively transforming them in his prose and drawings.

2. Jerzy Jarzębski, Schulzowskie miejsca i znaki, Gdańsk 2016.

The author is convinced that there is a common history of reading Schulz and understanding his work. One version of it is presented in this volume.

3. Włodzimierz Bolecki, Wenus z Drohobycza, Gdańsk 2017.

Who needs Schulzology today, when we know that Schulz cannot be turned into a hero of the media or of politics?

4. Serge Fauchereau, Fantazmatyczny świat Brunona Schulza, przeł. Paulina Tarasiewicz, Gdańsk 2018.

A Polish translation of a brilliant essay analysing Schulz’s artistic and literary work in the context of avantgarde European literary and artistic movements of the 20th century.

5. Piotr Sitkiewicz, Bruno Schulz i krytycy, Gdańsk 2018.

A book devoted to the critical, literary and artistic reception of Schulz’s stories and visual works during his lifetime.

6. Henri Lewi, Bruno Schulz, czyli strategie mesjańskie, przeł. Tomasz Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2019.

Polish translation of the only French-language attempt to date at a comprehensive analysis of Schulz’s literary and artistic work.

7. Józef Olejniczak, Pryncypia i marginesy Schulza, Gdańsk 2019.

A collection of personal essays about the work, biography and legend of Bruno Schulz, which are all a record of Olejniczak’s fascination “at first sight”.

8. Schulz. Słownik mówiony, red. Marcin Całbecki, Piotr Millati, Gdańsk 2019.

Continuation of work on Bruno Schulz’s dictionary. The entries collected in this volume are the fruit of an academic conference organized at the University of Gdańsk.

9. Katarzyna Warska, **Schulz w kanonie. Recepcja szkolna w latach 1945–2018**, Gdańsk 2022.

The publication discusses the school reception of Bruno Schulz's life and work, including: the political, social, critical and historical literary background in the years 1945–2018.

10. Stanisław Rosiek, **Odcięcie. Szkice wokół Brunona Schulza**, Gdańsk 2022.

A collection of essays in which the point of reference is Schulz's literary identity, understood not as a continuity of memory, but as a flickering and never-finished game between the writer's style, imagination and existence.

11. Jakub Orzeszek, **Drugie ciało pisarza. Eseje o Brunonie Schulzu**, Gdańsk 2023.

Eleven illustrated essays whose main theme are the erotic and mournful bodies of Bruno Schulz: both those created by the author of *The Cinnamon Shops* in prose, drawings and graphics, and those created after his death – in the form of artistic homage or martyrological cult of him.

Schulz Archive

Bruno Schulz w oczach współczesnych. Antologia tekstów krytycznych i publicystycznych lat 1920–1939, redakcja Piotr Sitkiewicz, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Gdańsk 2021.

From the first press mention in the Lviv “Chwila” to the obituary published in the conspiratorial monthly “Sztuka i Naród” – an anthology of critical and journalistic pieces shows how contemporaries perceived the literary and artistic work of Bruno Schulz, as well as himself as a person.

The basis for qualifying the text for this anthology was the appearance of Schulz’s name in any context – critical or biographical. Therefore, extensive reviews and critical sketches are juxtaposed with short press mentions of a strictly informative nature.

Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje z archiwum Jerzego Ficowskiego, redakcja Jerzy Kandziora, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Gdańsk 2022.

Jerzy Ficowski’s first appeals for the broad literary society to submit memories of Schulz and information about his memorabilia appeared in June 1948. The letters of those who contacted Ficowski at the earliest formed the core of Schulz’s biography used in *Regions of the Great Heresy*, the first monograph – which, to a large extent, is a biographical narrative. The next book about Schulz, *Okolice sklepów cynamonowych*, departs from this convention: it is a collection of reports, sketches, and contextual stories in which Schulz’s artifacts and new witnesses, revealed and given voice for the first time, also begin to play an important role.

Shortly before his death, Ficowski wrote about his Schulz archive, recommending it to Jerzy Jarzębski: “There are [...] a lot of different letters, reports of correspondence, etc., which are the basis of my past biographical research and collections. I didn’t use everything: there are some details in these materials that didn’t fit into what I wrote, or some that I could only treat briefly and cursorily. I think this material may be useful again – as a complement or exemplification.

Collected works

Schulz's work has not yet been organized and edited critically. There has never been a critical edition of his prose that would take into account the magazine first editions of the stories, which were often significantly different from the versions in the published original text of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. The book edition of Schulz's reviews and essays did not include all pieces of his criticism known to us. It was also the case with the volume of his correspondence. This comprehensive edition collects and organizes all existing knowledge about the writer. But not only. Schulz – like Norwid or Witkacy – is a “bimodal” creator who communicated both in words and images. It is impossible to separate Schulz the writer from Schulz the artist, and this parallelism was taken into account in the arrangement of his *Collected Works*. The series, which was initially planned for seven volumes, has expanded to nine volumes, of which four have been published so far; further volumes are being prepared.

Volume 1: Xięga bałwochwalcza

The first publication collecting reproductions of all preserved portfolios of *The Booke of Idolatry*, along with a critical commentary. It will be published in 2024.

Volume 2: Sklepy cynamonowe, wstęp i opracowanie Jerzy Jarzębski, dodatek krytyczny Stanisław Rosiek, opracowanie językowe Małgorzata Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2018.

Volume 3: Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą

The second volume of Schulz's stories is a variorum edition – it takes into account magazine variants of the texts. It is illustrated with the author's original graphics.

Volume 4: Kometa i inne opowiadania

The volume will include all of Schulz's stories that were not included in the original volumes of *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, including the recently discovered *Undula*. Publication planned for 2024.

Volume 5: Księga listów, zebrał i przygotował do druku Jerzy Ficowski, uzupełnił Stanisław Danecki, Gdańsk 2012.

Volume. 6: Księga rękopisów

Volume 7: Szkice krytyczne, koncepcja edytorska Włodzimierz Bolecki, komentarze i przypisy Mirosław Wójcik, opracowanie językowe Piotr Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017.

Volume 8: Rysunki i szkice

Volume. 9: Varia



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