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ON BRUNO SCHULZ'S DEMYTHOLOGIZATION OF REALITY*

The year 1934 is a turning point of its kind in the history of the formation of the Schulzian world and myth. It is in this period that both these lines—of the world and of the myth—gradually start to undergo a number of profound, irreversible changes. The success of *Cinnamon Shops* not so much satisfies the author as worries him, being slowly transformed into a source of uncertainty and anxiety: “I would have a lot of reasons to be glad now, I could afford some joy, but I experience some undefined fear, worry, grief in my life instead.”¹ The joy of victory is gradually replaced by a depressive vision of the apparent here-presence, it gives way to the intolerable pressure of the complex of “a lost life”: “I neglect important correspondence that I care about, I do not write anything, I even feel deep revulsion towards copying something already written. And such an improbable spring has just come to the world, with all its breezes, lights, presentiments—only to make me realize that I am already on the other side of all springs.”² If, at the beginning of the letter, in the author’s articulation of his inner states and feelings, the motif of some indescribability still prevails (“I experience some

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¹ Bruno SCHULZ, “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [April 24, 1934], in the same, *Księga listów (A Book of Letters)*, collected and edited by Jerzy Ficowski, 2nd edition, corrected and supplemented (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002), 63. All of Bruno Schulz’s letters are quoted from this edition.

² Ibid.

undefined fear, worry, grief in my life”³), with time the origin of those depressing moods becomes more and more distinctive. The writer’s own product turns out to be an element threatening to destroy his whole, hard-won, world. *The Cinnamon Shops* present a challenge to the writer that he cannot, at this stage of his life, face: “For a month I have written nothing, painted nothing—and sometimes I have the feeling that I am not going to write anything more that would be good. I really feel sorry about wasting such success that I achieved with *The Shops*, and I will waste it if I do not publish something at least to the same level still this year.”⁴ Those ambitious plans, however, were not carried out. On the other hand, the germs of an, in fact, destructive complex are revealed, which with time will be identified as the “Schulz” issue. Being a separate dimension of the psychological reality filled with intensive emotions, the “Schulz” issue gradually starts to aspire to absolute domination, completely subjecting every element of the individual’s inner world, keeping him in constant tension and uncertainty: “I have found out that my chronic depression results from the quietist and eudaimonistic approach, from drawing up a balance of satisfaction every moment. Every moment I ask myself the question: do I have the right to be satisfied, is the “Schulz” issue worth continuing, worth further efforts. And I make my defeatist or optimist decision dependent on the answer to this questionnaire; most often, the decision is defeatist.”⁵ So the “Schulz” issue is identified with the question of the success of *The Cinnamon Shops*, from the perspective of a future which is indeed unattainable. Any attempt to write something after the collection of stories was published is questioned by the author: “Long months are passing and nothing I do gains my approval, no idea that emerges satisfies me, I like nothing.”⁶ The very writing after the successful attempt to “highlight the history of a certain family, a certain home”⁷ becomes something impossible: “You should rather assume, which would be true, that I am plunged into a deep downfall of the spirit and it seems to me that I am not able to write anything more! I try to comfort and persuade myself that it is neurasthenia, but this aversion to the pen has been lasting for over six months, and this is some food for thought.”⁸ What is the textual and

³ Ibid.

⁴ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [November 7, 1934], 74.

⁵ “List do A. Pleśniewicza” (A letter to A. Pleśniewicz) [November 29, 1936], 115.

⁶ “List do R. Halpern” (A Letter to R. Halpern) [September 30, 1936], 129.

⁷ “Exposé o książce Brunona Schulza” (A Statement on Bruno Schulz’s Book), *ibid.*, 325.

⁸ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 5, 1934], 65.

circumtextual reality of *The Cinnamon Shops* is perceived as a reality with a special axiological status, since it has the stamp of the “brilliant epoch” of creating one’s own myth, in which a man and the world revive their wholeness *ab origine*, in which the word, subjected to regression, tends towards its “seedbed”, to the “place of origin of the word.” On the other hand, the situation in which the author presents himself, a situation horrifying with the barrenness of the “hic” and “nunc,” proves that there is a deep hiatus separating the unstable and depressed “I” from the ideal time of creating “for myself”: “From the older fragments I have chosen one—or, indeed, not a fragment but a work to a certain degree closed in itself, entitled *July Nights*, intending to send it to «Kamena». And I cannot find energy in myself to correct and copy it, as I have it in rather raw draft. I have a feeling as if by working it out again I would profane this text that grew from a kind of inspiration that I cannot face up to anymore.”⁹ In turn, what is written in the here-and-now does not find approval, functioning in the space of self-reflection as some would-be text or non-text: “I have only written a bigger short story, about 60 pages of print.¹⁰ I am going to publish it in some periodical, and then together with other short stories publish it in a separate volume. I am not satisfied with it.”¹¹ It is characteristic that the author talks only about “would-be or non-texts.” The very mechanism of rejecting things that are not inscribed in the positive perspective of the “Schulz” issue becomes a separate motif that may be consistently rationalized: “Long months are passing and nothing I do gains my approval, no idea that emerges satisfies me, I like nothing. This state of a lack of being satisfied with myself dooms me to idleness. But sometimes I think that this severity is justified and I doom imperfect and half-baked things to extermination. There is only this drawback in it, namely, that at the beginning one has to agree to imperfect things in order to gather momentum, to get excited and intoxicated, and somewhere at the limits of his possibilities to find things that are perfect.”¹² The author considers an attempt at a radical modification of his own style another chance that will favor the emergence of “perfect things”: “I already long for some new style. I cannot conclude several short stories.”¹³ Both these strategies—of rationalization and of modification—remain rather wishful thinking, they are

⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰ It is about *Spring*.

¹¹ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Brezowie) [May 11, 1936], 54.

¹² “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [September 30, 1936], 129.

¹³ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Brezowie) [May 11, 1936], 54.

concerned more with the domain of correspondence than of the writer's practice, they are constituted as a part of the defensive strategy of a tense and unstable psyche. Next, realizing the irreversible atrophy of the fundamental principle of creating—the principle of “mythologizing the reality”—is ever more horrifying. The world is still being experienced as a set of potential contents, a series of historical events that demand that they should be brought to light, but the mechanism of the actualization of the contents-history, the mechanism of regression, is blocked. Between the creative personality and the “material” that serves highlighting history there is a gap of barrenness: “This wonderful autumn (a real “second autumn” from the treatise) goes away from me not used, barely noticed.”¹⁴ Expressing the world/highlighting “history” is only possible on the condition that there is, in the author's private microcosm, peace and harmony that are not threatened with anything. But by the end of 1933/start of 1934 the factors that guarantee that harmony are ever less available. The act of creation-expression requires the constant presence of one's own-Another; bringing out the “meaning of the world” is born in a ceaseless dialogue: “I need a partner for revealing enterprises. What is risky, impossible, what is a caprice making no sense for one man—becomes reality when it is reflected in four eyes. It is as if the world was waiting for this joined effort: closed up till now, tight, with no further plans—it begins to ripen with the colors of the far-away, to crack and to open to its inside. Painted prospects become deeper and split into real perspectives, the wall lets us go to the dimensions that earlier were unavailable, frescos painted on the horizon liven up like in the pantomime.”¹⁵ “Another” is first of all someone who is an initiate, who knows about the rite of bringing out the meaning, in the rite of expressing the world, and not a passive witness. Due to his-own-Another, the inner world is inscribed in the metaphysical perspective, it is filled with meaning, is born anew. In 1933 Józefina Szelińska starts playing the role of his-own-Another in the author's life. It is she who is able to reverse the total destruction in the microcosm of the creative “I,” allowing him to regain the desired balance, opening him to another attempt to “name” the world: “She, my fiancée, is my share in life, through her agency I am a human being, and not just a lemur or a kobold. She loves me more than I love her, but I need her more to live. She has redeemed me, already nearly lost and vanished in non-human lands, barren

¹⁴ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [November 7, 1934], 74.

¹⁵ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Brezowie) [June 21, 1934], 48.

Hadeses of fantasy, with her love. She restored me to life and to the earth. She is someone closest to me on Earth.”¹⁶ The relational dimension “me-her” is, at the same time, constituted as a compensatory and symbiotic dimension. The value of Another is, first of all, me-as-value-for-him. Another is indispensable for the continual confirmation and recognition of the exceptional quality of the author’s world, of the exceptional quality of his “I”: “Anyway, she is a person that is closest to me and a dear one, for whom I mean a lot—is it not a great thing—to mean everything for someone?”¹⁷ Hence, goodwill for Another does not consist of discovering the authenticity of his universum, but in the character of my-presence-in-it: “Will you believe that no other woman has loved me yet with such fervent love and such an emotion, and probably I will never again meet a person filled with me to this extent. This emotion of hers enslaves me and obliges me. I could not waste this feeling one meets only once in his life. It is beyond my power. Apart from this I am so attached to her, I like her and I feel good with her.”¹⁸ There is, however, another functional dimension of the functionalization of the dichotomy “I-she.” It is first of all the actualization of certain stereotypes and a projection of them onto the plane of the relationship with Another-he/Another-she. As a “native of the same spiritual land”¹⁹ the author refers to the behavior norms, that is, ones worth imitating, that prevail in it: “Maybe loneliness would be a source of my inspirations, but could life shared with her knock me out of the proper climate of my work—that was food for thought for me. Maybe loneliness was the source of my inspiration, but does living together really break this loneliness? Does one not remain lonely in spite of it?”²⁰ Another stereotype, also assessed as positive and aspiring to the position of a possible scenario of behaviors, is the wedding. The wedding as an escape from the complicated, overwhelming reality: “I do not want to complain, but I live in very poor and uncomfortable conditions. I live in two rooms with my sister who is a widow, a very nice person, but ill and sad; with an older cousin who keeps the house; and with my nephew, a twenty-six year old young man, who is a kind of melancholic. This is why it seems to me that marriage will be a change for the better for me.”²¹ Both these

¹⁶ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [September 19, 1936], 127.

¹⁷ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [September 30, 1936], 129–130.

¹⁸ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [the beginning of November 1936], 132.

¹⁹ The same, “Nowy poeta” (A new poet), in the same, *Szkice krytyczne (Critical sketches)*, ed. Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak (Lublin: UMCS, 2000), 53.

²⁰ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [September 30, 1936], 129.

²¹ “Letter to R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [the beginning of November 1936], 132.

stereotypes have different sources, they may be associated with completely different worlds—the world of poetry and the world of convention and routine. The one and the other are taken into consideration, because they may be useful in building a space that would be suitable for expressing an individual myth. Compensatory and symbiotic aspects of the dichotomy “I—she” are clearly seen when Józefina Szelińska decides to go to Warsaw: “Since I left Drohobych in 1934 we started our correspondence; it was interrupted with a few, generally short periods when we met; it was full of passionate letters that saved Bruno in his depressions, full of mothering protection and care for this man, helpless in the sphere of life; on his side—full of letters, almost always “express delivery” for keeping possibly fast, constant contact, letters that were most tender in his devotion.”²² A lack of his-own-Another, treated first of all in the categories of protection, recognition, confirmation, to a large degree makes the creative “I” dependent on the necessity of staying within the range of the influence of the protective body. A symbiotic “I” functions properly only under the condition of constantly meeting the fundamental principle—“to mean everything for someone.” “I have to have closeness and communication with Juna (this is my fiancée’s name) assured so that I could function at all. This is the zero point from which I go up on the scale of imagination. Now I can neither write nor draw.”²³ However, the project of “living together” gradually starts losing its charm. It turns out that its realization is connected with painstaking effort and the burden of responsibility. In any case, from the very beginning there is a shadow of anxiety over the history of the matrimonial project (“I only do not know if I can cope with supporting two houses, since my family has no income”²⁴), doubts (“In Zakopane I will be with my fiancée (yes—so late)—the whole business is an immense risk”²⁵) and a lack of firmness. Furthermore, the time showed that there was no common project: there were two completely different visions of common life excluding each other.²⁶ Their clash leads to a catastrophe in

²² Jerzy FICOWSKI, “J [...] Bezimienna” (J [...] Nameless), in the same, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia (The Regions of Great Heresy and Their Surroundings. Bruno Schulz and His Mythology)* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2002), 325.

²³ Bruno SCHULZ, “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [September 19, 1936], 128.

²⁴ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [the beginning of November 1936], 132.

²⁵ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 24, 1935], 81.

²⁶ The intention to leave the family town is a signal showing the complete divergence of the projects of the common life. The moment is deeply realized by Józefa Szelińska: “And misunderstandings, or rather an inner struggle, started the moment when we decided to move to Warsaw” (FICOWSKI, “J [...] Bezimienna”, 326).

both worlds: “Unfortunately I have to sadden you with the news that my relationship with Juna has broken down completely. She finally became discouraged with my hopeless situation, with the difficulties connected with my moving to Warsaw, that she attributed—quite rightly—to my helplessness. I do not even know where she is now, for she even broke off the communication by letters with me.”²⁷ If at the beginning of the break-up the artist’s ego, entangled in the symbiotic relation, recognizes that his partner’s gesture was right when she finally finished the process of mutual “poisoning” each other, later the assessment of their common past is radically changed. At the end of April 1937, in one of the letters to Romana Halpern, Bruno Schulz referred to the ideal “there” and “then,” as well as to the image of the partner-protector that was no less ideal: “I feel sorry for both of us and for all our past doomed to destruction. I will never find another one like her.”²⁸ But already in June of the same year the hurt *ego* of the writer decides to rewrite the history of his own presence in the “I-she” relationships. In this old-new story he gains a new role—the role of a victim breaking free from the burden of unnecessary relations, and the story itself is examined as a series of infernal events and of an unhappy relationship with a femme fatale: “I am just after the final break-up with my fiancée. My acquaintance with her was a life of misery and hard moments. In the end I feel the fact that she finally broke up with me as a relief.”²⁹ But breaking up the symbiotic relationship and depriving the ex-fiancée of the status of his-own-Another only creates an illusion of freedom, making the effect of trauma more profound and re-launching all the negative motifs and patterns that had been minimized thanks to the presence of the protective body: “Although I should be glad of this break-up—now I feel a terrible void and nothingness of life. I cannot do anything, I cannot take any book in my hand, for immediately I feel sick and awfully bored [...] I cannot recognize myself. I, who have always had my head full of issues, problems, have always been excited by various ideas, now trudge, empty, thoughtless and sluggish and I have a feeling that it is already the end of everything. For months I have not been writing anything, I am not able to write a shortest article. Even to write a letter I have to overcome [a lot].”³⁰ It is not accidental that the words “empty” and “void” appear in this passage. It is one of the key identifica-

²⁷ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Breza) [April 8, 1937], 57.

²⁸ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [April 30, 1937], 139.

²⁹ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 2, 1937], 85.

³⁰ Ibid.

tions in the author's self-narrative space shaped after the break-up with Józefina Szelińska. To experience a void first of all means to be absent from one's-own-Another/for one's-own-Another. A void/absence is the opposite of a presence/abundance, of a presence guaranteed by Another ("probably I will never again meet a person who filled with me to this extent"). The opposition "void-presence" emphatically stresses an exceptional meaning of the relationship with one's-own-Another. On the *explicite* level of the narration, the meaning of his relationship with his fiancée ("affairs of the heart") is as if reduced, yielding to a discourse of total defeat: "I feel that all this is not only a result of my affairs of the heart, but that I have entered some [*sic!*] new phase of life whose dominant feature is a great and basic disappointment—the nothingness of life."³¹ The coexistence of the discourse of trauma ("affairs of the heart") and the discourse of an existential void ("nothingness of life") in one narrative space is again food for thought, for pondering over the role of one's-own-Another for the genesis of the inner story of the "I." First of all, it is the fact that the trauma of breaking up with Juna does not lead to the appearance of a "new phase of life" but to the reactivation of those destructive processes that preoccupied the artist's whole personality, even at the beginning of the 1930's. In the letters to Zenon Waśniewski dated 1934 this state is described by such phrases as "I am already on the other side of all springs" and "the wretched end of everything." In June 1934 Schulz wrote: "The sorrow of life, fear of the future, a kind of a vague conviction about the wretched end of everything, some decadent *Weltschmerz* or what, damn it."³² If, at that time, a catastrophe is still something that is far away, not defined precisely, in 1936 the vague presentiments acquire the shape of the fatal reality. The inability to express-interpret the world becomes such a catastrophe for the artist. In his letters, the basic mechanism blocking his creative activity is first of all identified with the lack of the desired peace and harmony. In order to stress the individual myth, exceptional conditions are necessary: "I need a good silence, a little secret, nourishing joy, some contemplative greed for silence, for good weather. I cannot suffer. Suffering does not strengthen me."³³ This issue gradually takes the form of a separate, emotionally intensive, formula. In a letter to Romana Halpern the artist wrote: "I come to the conclusion that the most important cause of my depression is idleness, unproductiveness. And the

³¹ Ibid.

³² "List do Z. Waśniewskiego" (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 5, 1934], 65.

³³ "List do R. Halpern" (A letter to R. Halpern) [November 15, 1936], 134.

cause of my idleness is the prejudice that I can only work when everything is all right and when I am glad and have a little cheerfulness in my soul.”³⁴ A similar formula is also present in a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz: “I find that the cause of my meager production should be ascribed to a lack of discipline or of the technique of living, an inability to arrange my day. I surrender to the prejudice that creative work may only start when, in the whole area of my life, all difficulties are dealt with, nothing threatens me and a breath of cheerfulness hovers over the «reassured» soul. And one has to wait long for this. A problem that is outstanding and not taken care of, an inner inconvenience is enough to spoil my willingness to write.”³⁵ The second half of the 1930s is a time when the protective “prejudice” is gradually got rid of. It is an awful period, when “on the whole area of life” difficulties and inconveniences multiply at a tremendous speed. In 1935 Bruno Schulz’s brother died, and this meant that the onerous care of the relatives would rest solely on the artist’s shoulders: “My brother supported my home, that is, my sister and my nephew, he was the breadwinner for a number of families that now are left with nothing to live on. It will be hard now—I do not know what I will do.”³⁶ His brother’s death was, for the artist, a crushing burden of responsibility for his family until the end of his life. The responsibility for his family becomes almost a usurper element that threatens the constituting of the world of his individual myth. The artist remains in a state of constant dilemma between his world and the world of the house at Floriańska Street. His self-sacrifice and sense of duty hamper the realization of the plans concerning his work, they are an obstacle to the communication with the one’s-own-Another that is necessary for the artist’s world. The joy of going to Zakopane was clouded by his concern for the well-being of his family: “I will have less than 200 złoty (for 10 months). It would be enough for me if not for the fact that I also have to support my sister’s house, as my sister lives with me and her cousin.”³⁷ His family and his supporting them is an important, albeit not the only, reason, for the problem is also uncertainty and the lack of firmness of the artist himself; a factor that does not allow him to leave the provincial town and go to Warsaw. In a letter to Romana Halpern Schulz wrote: “Do not be angry about my refusal, with which I have rewarded your efforts and care. If you consider my situation closely you will

³⁴ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [November 29, 1936], 136.

³⁵ “List do A. Pleśniewicza” (A letter to A. Pleśniewicz) [December 1, 1936], 116.

³⁶ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [January 28, 1935], 78.

³⁷ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 24, 1935], 81.

recognize that I could not accept your proposition. I have already told you that I have to support three people (my sister, cousin and nephew) whom I may not leave to their own fate.”³⁸ Responsibility for his family also made the writer constantly accept the job of a teacher, so hateful to him and triggering real repulsion (“Teaching at school has palled on me to the limits of my endurance”³⁹) and it evoked the presentiment of an irreversible disaster (“I am afraid that this year of working at school will kill me”⁴⁰). But even this hateful source of income at a certain moment is threatened. The artist’s imagination at once responds with a catastrophic vision of the future: “I was already thinking about being deprived of my job and about being in grinding poverty. Looking at town madmen, at beggars in rags, I thought: maybe soon I will look like that. Professional duties fill me with terror, disgust, they petrify my joy of living. Among these unemployed people all that is heard are threats and reprimands. Duty grows to some apocalyptic dimensions.”⁴¹ The vicious circle of “family-work” overloads the artist’s “ego,” his responsibility for his close relatives constantly forces him to draw plans, or, in fact, to abandon them: “I would most gladly move to some retreat with just one man and start, like Proust, to ultimately formulate my world. For some time I found support in the thought that next year I would retire (40 percent of the salary). Now I have quit this idea because of my family that I would not be able to support.”⁴² Being a hostage of his duty, at the same time he becomes a hostage of the lethal void imposed by the reality of the provincial town: “I live a life that is not at all at my level. Apart from books, that also seldom come (I have to read what is there, I cannot read what I would like to), I have no support for my inner life, and everything around me exudes an indescribable mundanity that also affects me with its brutal weight.”⁴³ Bringing out his myth, formulating his world, constantly requires spiritual and intellectual dynamics, a constant presence of one’s-own-Another, of broad dialogic horizons. Without meeting these conditions the writer’s world is doomed to gradual disappearance: “As far as I am concerned, I would like to have *in continuo*—for many months free time for thinking, for reading, for my inner work. There are so many things to think over, so much to order.

³⁸ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [August 30, 1937], 145.

³⁹ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [March 16, 1935], 79.

⁴⁰ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [August 30, 1937], 146.

⁴¹ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [November 15, 1936], 133–134.

⁴² “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [June 1939], 177.

⁴³ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [October 29, 1938], 173.

Also, the issue of my spiritual food is so badly settled. I feel hungry for ideas, for books, for new patterns of thinking. And if only those periods of depression did not come back—for they paralyze me! Maybe I should be treated by some psychiatrist. These depressions disorganize me, making it impossible to work continually. For 7 weeks, perhaps 6 are poisoned by it.”⁴⁴ At the end of the 1930’s the *ego*’s defensive strategies lose their efficiency. The poet’s own world seems to be on the verge of complete disintegration: “In the past I was defended by a certain kind of blindness, I had blinkers on my eyes, like a horse in harness. Now reality has defeated me and barged into my inside.”⁴⁵ Staying in the hermetic hell of depression, the creative “I” tries to restore the balance by reviewing those strategies that, in the past, efficiently effected shaping the spiritual-emotional identity. Because of this basic redefinition, the vision of the dialogic presence in the world is actualized anew: “[...] I have got rid of the old illusion that was rooted in me, namely, that I am made to be lonely. Maybe some time ago I was, but today a void and lifelessness exude from the landscape, I cannot feed myself at God’s table.”⁴⁶ The withdrawal into his own depths also actualizes again the complex of the “prejudice of harmony,” once again confirming its rightness: “I miss not so much faith in my abilities, but something more general: trust in life, staying safely in my own fate, faith in the ultimate favor that the being supplies. Once I had it, even though I did not know it. This faith, this trust opens reserves of creativity in us, it is this wealthy, sated climate in which those late fruit hardly ripens.”⁴⁷ And so, at the end of the 1930s, none of these strategies could be realized. The hermetic space of the provinces reduces the possibility of actualizing the principle of “trust in life” to a minimum, and under these circumstances the presence of the one’s-own-Another has a character of a rather virtual reality, usually existing only in letters. All these negative factors add to the history of forming the second, and at the same time last, collection of stories—from the beginning of the crystallization of their texts until its separate edition. Part of the texts included in the collection *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* had already been published in literary periodicals in the period when the writer’s literary production was perceived as non-text/*quasi*-text. This is why the new editorial project is treated with a certain anxiety by the artist—as a possible threat to

⁴⁴ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [August 16, 1937], 142.

⁴⁵ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [October 29, 1938], 174.

⁴⁶ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [August 4, 1937], 86.

⁴⁷ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [between August 20 and 26, 1938], 143.

the whole sphere of experiences connected with the “Schulz” issue. Hence doubts and the delaying of the final decision to publish the collection: “I cannot make the decision to have the short stories printed—an aversion to taking a decision”⁴⁸. However, despite the doubts and anxieties he makes up his mind to publish the texts. On the other hand, his attitude towards the whole undertaking remains unchanged: “I gave my book to the editor as long ago as January. When it will be published—I do not know, I am not very interested in it, as I am not pleased with the book.”⁴⁹ Dissatisfaction with his own work distances the artist from contact with his “imperfect” nature: “For nearly three weeks I have had my new book at home for an author’s revision, which I have not done yet because of my aversion to it.”⁵⁰ If the whole process of forming the collection and preparing it for print is going on in an atmosphere of discouragement, suspicion, or even aversion, the moment *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* is published the negative emotions gradually give way to the tense expectation of the readers’ reactions. This is because the question of whether the “Schulz” issue is worth further efforts depends on the reception. One of the letters to Romana Halpern may show how much Another’s opinion is important: “Your words about the book have given me a lot of pleasure. It is very good that you like it. I nearly stop believing in it. Nobody apart from you said something good about it to me.”⁵¹ But a favorable opinion of the collection born in the atmosphere of uncertainty that was expressed by a friend is not enough to convince the author himself about its true value. An artist needs a positive reaction first of all from a broad community of readers: a literary work’s element must be a dialog, Another’s real and deep involvement. However, the space of reception is not formed according to the author’s expectations, and this, in turn, leads to constant tension and fear: “Apart from that I am surprised by the silence that *Sanatorium* encounters. What could be the reason?”⁵² An undefined reception makes the artist undertake an attempt to initiate reading *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* in the circle of one’s-own-Anothers. An appeal in a letter to Tadeusz Breza may be considered an example in this field: “Dear Tadzio, thank you for your words—those positive and those negative ones. It seems that you are right in both these cases. I do not have

⁴⁸ “List do A Pleśniewicza” (A letter to A. Pleśniewicz) [November 29, 1936], 115.

⁴⁹ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 2, 1937], 85.

⁵⁰ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [August 3, 1937], 141.

⁵¹ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [January 23, 1938], 154.

⁵² “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [February 21, 1938], 159.

to tell you how glad I would be if you wrote something about the book. So little has been written about it until now. In fact, there has been no mention of it in the press. Thank you cordially in advance.”⁵³ The deep need for a dialogic reception is also proven by Schulz’s letter to Zenon Waśniewski: “Have you read *Sanatorium*? I could not send you an author’s copy like I would like to because «Rój» has given me only a small number of copies that I immediately gave out in Warsaw to critics and influential people—with no big response. How about you—did you like it?”⁵⁴ “No big response” does not mean, however, a complete lack of reception. Quite a lot of different articles appear on the new collection.⁵⁵ The artist tries to follow the history of the formation of the space of reception around *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and this, in turn, triggers different reactions from him—from finding that there are positive or negative opinions (“In «Pion» Sandauer’s article appeared as a review: *On the work of mythologists* that was about Gombrowicz and Schulz,”⁵⁶ “From the voices in the press Berman’s enthusiastic review reached me that was published in the Lvov «Opinia,» and a positive one in «Sygnały» by Promiński,”⁵⁷ or “I received Piasecki’s article and I thank you. It is vulgar and stupid”⁵⁸) to an evasion that is a possible self-defense strategy, e.g.: “I heard that in «Pióro» there was an article by Fryde that attacked me. Is it very dangerous? If so, I do not want to read it. As a matter of fact I do not care about it now.”⁵⁹ The irreversible character of the acute inner conflict becomes ever more obvious, since reactions to the second collection of stories do not suit the author’s ambitious expectations as he was sure of the uniqueness of his world, mission and myth. The publication of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* does not change anything in the author’s fate; it inevitably leads him to the realization of the unavoidability of another defeat: “I am more and more

⁵³ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Brezowie) [February 24, 1938], 57.

⁵⁴ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [April 24, 1938], 88.

⁵⁵ On the reception of Bruno Schulz’s fiction in the interwar period see: Włodzimierz BOLECKI, *Poetycki model prozy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym. Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Schulz i inni. Studium z poetyki historycznej (A Poetic Model of Fiction in the Interwar Period. Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Schulz and Others. A Study in Historical Poetics)* (Krakow: Universitas, 1996); “Recepcja (1934–1939)” (Reception «1939–1939»), in *Słownik schulzowski (A Schulzian Dictionary)*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki, Jerzy Jarzębski, Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2003), 305–307.

⁵⁶ Bruno SCHULZ, “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [February 6, 1938], 136.

⁵⁷ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [March 3, 1938], 160.

⁵⁸ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [February 21, 1938], 158.

⁵⁹ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [January 21, 1939], 176.

convinced how far I am from real life and how little I understand the spirit of the times. Everybody has somehow found some part for themselves, and I have been left out in the cold.”⁶⁰ An encounter with an alien and hostile reality threatening the destruction of his own/unique world at the same time dispels the truth about the fragility and transience of the human being: “It is our mutual sadness of growing old, of disappointment, of the naked skeleton of the truth.”⁶¹ From the perspective of this truth, one’s own defeat assumes an apocalyptic dimension, questioning any possibility of creating: “Do you think that this sadness may be changed into a motor of some creation, can it be artistically used, can the demon of creativity be fed with one’s own defeat? // I am not capable of it. My muse desires cheerfulness and warmth. At the fall of life it becomes sluggish and lazy, like flies at this time of the year.”⁶² These latter sentences are rather an example of the euphemization of the I-discourse, and not a simple comparative device: at the “fall of life” the muse not only becomes lazy but simply starts losing the ability to regress, to mythologize reality or, indeed, falls silent. This unbearable situation forces the artist to cover himself with generalities in his communication with the recipients, to create, as it were, an appearances of writing: “About my plans I do not want to write. It is my prejudice that they are not successful when one speaks about them too soon. Anyway they are not so high and bold.”⁶³ In a safer communication space, masks-generalities serving self-defense are replaced by bitter openness: “About my plans and works I do not write, I cannot write. It makes me too nervous and I cannot talk about it quietly.”⁶⁴ A defeat/catastrophe of one’s own world is gradually transformed into a script of interpersonal communication: “I am so much thrown out of balance, confused, that I cannot bring myself to write even the most urgent letter. I feel grief over my youth wasted in such a stupid way: there is some fever and anxiety in me, and panic “before the gate is closed.”⁶⁵ At the close of the 1930s a complicated complex of experiences is renewed with redoubled strength that is connected with the realization of the unavoidable transience. His own history of life is considered a history of a *quasi*-presence, a history of a *quasi*-life, a history of a lost gift: “At certain moments

⁶⁰ “List do A. Płockier” (A letter to A. Płockier) [November 15, 1940], 191.

⁶¹ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [April 24, 1938], 87.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁴ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [June 1939], 159.

⁶⁵ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [March 3, 1938], 160.

I was close to despair, like before an immediate catastrophe. The spring was so beautiful—one should live and swallow the world. And I spend days and nights without a woman and without the Muse and I waste away fruitlessly. Once I was roused from my sleep here with sudden deep despair that life is passing me by and I am not keeping anything from it. If such despair lasted for a longer time one could go mad. And maybe this despair will come and stay forever when it will be too late for life. [...] because this is the greatest misfortune—not to live one's life."⁶⁶ At the end of the 1930s, the discourse of despair is replaced by the discourse of the total ruin of the "I,"⁶⁷ and at the beginning of the 1940s the script of a "lost life" is actualized again. This thematic point may be found in one of the letters to Anna Płockier: "On Sunday Sandauer visited me and for this reason I was not able to keep my promise. He left me very depressed. My complex of a «lost life» was revived under his influence. He came in very good shape with all the ruthlessness of the young generation demanding that we empty the space for them."⁶⁸ The complex of a "lost life" not only indicates a defeat in Schulz's private life/his own world ("Now reality has defeated me and barged into my inside"⁶⁹), its revival also proves a definite disaster for the "Schulz" issue. The brilliant epoch, that of *Cinnamon Shops*, that of light-hearted writing for himself, has gone irretrievably. It has gone into oblivion, overflowing with fear and disappointment, the post-epoch of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. In the ravaged world of the "I" a deadly hush falls. The ability to create-interpret his own myth is transformed into the ability to imitate it. Hence, the reality of the "fall of life" is the reality of an irretrievable catastrophe anticipated in numerous stories written earlier. First of all, it is the triad *Dodo—The Pensioner—Loneliness*. Each of these stories realizes an identical script at the level of deep semantic structure. The constitutive elements of the script include the exclusion of the protagonist/his marginalization, the illusion of life, infernal loneliness. In each of the stories the protagonist's marginalization is the result of his being different that does not allow him to be "like everybody". In the case of Dodo, being different is his illness. "A long time ago, when he was still a child, Dodo suffered from some seri-

⁶⁶ "List do R. Halpern" (A letter to R. Halpern) [March 20, 1938], 162–163.

⁶⁷ This self-representation line is characteristic of Schulz's correspondence with Romana Halpern: "Your letter worried and depressed me. I could not answer at once for I am in a great depression, this time not only moral, but a fall of all my being" ("List do R. Halpern" [A letter to R. Halpern] [January 21, 1939], 175).

⁶⁸ "List do A. Płockier" (A letter to A. Płockier) [June 4, 1941], 192.

⁶⁹ "List do R. Halpern" (A letter to R. Halpern) [October 29, 1938], 174.

ous brain illness during which he was lying unconscious for several months, closer to death than to life, and when in spite of it he recovered—it turned out that he was sort of withdrawn from circulation, he did not belong to the community of rational human beings.”⁷⁰ For the narrator of the stories *The Pensioner* and *Loneliness* being different is the burden of getting old: “I am a pensioner in a literal and complete meaning of the word, very much advanced in this feature, seriously advanced, a pensioner of a higher order.”⁷¹ Being different not only separates—moves away—takes away, reducing the space of full-scaled communication. It indeed closes the life of an individual in a circle of a dreadful invariability: “When the lives of his peers were divided into phases, periods, articulated by border events, solemn and symbolic moments: name days, exams, engagements, promotions—his life passed in an undiversified monotony that was not disturbed by anything pleasant or unpleasant, and also the future appeared as a quite smooth way without events or surprises.”⁷² Dodo as a different person appears as if in a trap of double isolation. His situation is one of a *quasi*-presence, both in the life of the community and in his own: “Life that was not lived suffered, tortured itself in despair, whirled like a cat in a cage. In Dodo’s body, in this body of a halfwit, someone grew older without experiences, someone was becoming ripe for death without a tiny bit of content.”⁷³ If Dodo is not able to make any change in his life (“bricked up,” as one doomed to an “unrealized biography”), the protagonists of the two other stories make up their minds to express their protest. In *The Pensioner*, the loss of the last chance to feel part of a community that lives a real life is the cause of necessary changes (“At last I have decided to put a certain thought into action, a thought that for some time has bothered me more and more persistently”⁷⁴): “It is nice to have, even for several hours only, one’s own chair with a leather cushion, one’s own rulers, pencils and pens. It is nice to be jostled, or even reprimanded in a friendly way by colleagues. Someone will address me, someone will say a word, a jibe, make a joke—and I bloom for a moment. I contact someone, gets his homelessness and nothingness in something alive and warm. The other one moves away and does not feel my weight, does not

⁷⁰ The same, *Dodo*, in the same, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów (Stories. Selected Essays and Letters)*, ed. Jerzy Jarzębski, 2nd edition, revised and supplemented (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998), 292.

⁷¹ *Emeryt (The Pensioner)*, *ibid.*, 308.

⁷² *Dodo*, 293.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

notice that he carries me on his back, that I parasitize his life for a moment...// But since a new principal came to the office this also has come to an end.”⁷⁵ An attempt at demarginalization is made by means of the ritual of joining the community again. However, this time in a completely different quality, revealing the perspective of life *ab origine* for the individual: “Since that moment a new life has started for me. I have been totally preoccupied with the school. During my past life I was never so engrossed in a thousand problems, schemes and businesses. I was living in one great preoccupation.”⁷⁶ Even more, joining the community again on the basis of complete identification with it (“I would not like in any way to stand out, indeed, what I care for is to merge as much as possible, to disappear in the grey mass of the class”⁷⁷) allows him not only to remove the humiliating status of someone different, excluded, but also gives him a chance of gaining a totally new status—that of a key figure: “I became the center of all businesses, the most serious deals, the most convoluted and touchy affairs could not be run without my participation. I walked in the street always surrounded by a noisy rabble rapidly gesticulating.”⁷⁸ The idea of a return to the community contains a hidden claim to “conquer” it. The mask of absolute identification (“All my plans would collapse if I were privileged in any way compared to others”⁷⁹) allows him, as it were, without any great efforts to achieve what was impossible to achieve in the “past life.” As a consequence, however, it turns out that the victory is only an ostensible gesture made by a usurper deceived by the lures of his own intellectual manipulations. This is because it is one thing to be the leader of the “grey mass” of students, and something completely different to dictate the rules of the game in the universe of culture. Slowly, the role of a clown stops making one glad. The only possible exit from this unbearable situation proves to be an escape. A disguised one, because it hides and, in this way betrays, itself behind the conventional mechanism of the *deus ex machina*: “unfortunately Wicek got a new top on that day and he spun it with a swing in front of the corner of the school. The top was buzzing, a crowd gathered near the entrance, I was pushed outside the gate and at that moment I was blown off. [...] I was already flying high over the roofs. [...] And I was carried higher into the grey, unfathomable

⁷⁵ Ibid., 315–316.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 319–320.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 318.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 320.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 318.

autumn expanses.”⁸⁰ If the pensioner in the title story tries to compensate for the weight of his own absence by means of “parasitizing” the life of others, the pensioner in the story *Loneliness* uses the strategy of “parasitizing metaphors.” He examines the metaphor as a magical tool for reducing the chasm between the world and a separate individual, marginalized in the community: “Shall I betray that my room is also bricked up? How is that? Bricked up? How could I leave it? It is exactly this: for good will there is no obstacle, nothing can resist strong desire. I only have to imagine a door, a good old door, like the one in the kitchen of my childhood, with an iron knob and a bolt. There is no room so bricked up that would not open to such a trusted door, if only there is enough strength to convince it that the door exists.”⁸¹ It could seem that the metaphorization of reality is that ideal mechanism of building relationships on the level of “I—the world,” able to neutralize the incessant marginalization of otherness, of difference. Due to the transforming power of the metaphor, the protagonist of *Loneliness* is able to achieve what Dodo could never manage to do—the power of imagination sets the bricked-up one free. The universal power of the metaphor also allows him to avoid the tension connected with the strategy of disguise used by the protagonist of *The Pensioner*. However, the metaphor proves to be utterly helpless against the irreversibility of the processes of the destruction characteristic of the “I—I” dimension. The realization of his ultimate defeat makes his inner world cease functioning as a peculiar exceptional whole. In the deepest structures of the “I” complete alienation and disintegration occur. The world of the “I” can no longer be the source of self-verification and spiritual support: “Sometimes I see myself in the mirror. A strange thing, funny and painful! I am ashamed to confess it. I never see myself *en face*, face to face. But a little deeper, a little farther, I am standing there, inside the mirror, a little to the side, a little in profile, I am standing lost in thought and I am looking to the side. I am standing still looking to the side, a little behind me. Our looks have stopped meeting. When I move, he moves too, but half turned back, as if he did not know about me, as if he had moved behind a lot of mirrors and had not been able to come back. My heart bleeds when I see him so alien and so indifferent. But it is you, I would like to shout, you have been my accurate reflection, you have accompanied me for so many years, and now you do not recognize me! My God! Alien, and looking somewhere

⁸⁰ Ibid., 324–325.

⁸¹ *Samotność (Loneliness)* in: the same, *Opowiadania (Stories)*, 327.

to the side, you are standing there and you seem to listen somewhere deep, to wait for a word, but from there, from the glass depth, obedient to somebody else, waiting for orders from somewhere else.”⁸² In *Loneliness* and in the stories *Dodo* and *The Pensioner* the changes only occur in the surface structure of the texts (the discourse of the *quasi*-presence in one’s own life and in that of the community), and the deep structure remains unchanged, representing, in each of the three stories, the modus of ultimate defeat (minus-presence).

The story *The Homeland*, published in 1938, is a peculiar attempt at achieving reconciliation at the level of both (deep and surface) semantic structures by means of the actualizing of an identical script. The text was planned as an alternative, ideal history of life where the discourse of defeat is subject, as it might seem, to ultimate neutralization. The narrative space of *The Homeland* is created as it were thanks to a consistent and detailed re-writing of all the elements of which the history of life consists. Omitting even one of these elements would threaten the whole construction with being destroyed. In turn, the specificity of the protagonist’s semiotic space is the basic pattern that is reconstructed or rewritten. If in real life negative experiences occur that are connected with the fact that the status of the artist did not function (“The embassy absolutely did not take care of me, I also cannot count on it in the future”⁸³), in the idealized world of narration the aspect is subjected to proper correction: “Everywhere I turned to somebody, I found a situation that was like one prepared just for me; people at once stopped doing their jobs as if they had been waiting for me; I noticed that unconscious glint of attention in their eyes, this immediate decision, a readiness to serve me, as if they yielded to the diktat of some higher body.”⁸⁴ In real life, the creative “I” is permanently frustrated because he is not recognized by others: “They ignore me awfully.”⁸⁵ The reality of the narration, on the other hand, suggests an ideal solution to this problem: “I only felt it as compensating a need that was not fulfilled for long, as the deep satiation of an eternal hunger of a rejected and unrecognized artist, I felt that it was here that they had finally appreciated my talent.”⁸⁶ If in real life ambitious expectations (“I would very much like to get this prize mainly because it is a bridge to going beyond the borders of the Polish language. And the money also means

⁸² *Ibid.*, 326–327.

⁸³ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [August 29, 1938], 171.

⁸⁴ *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, in the same, *Opowiadania*, 372–373.

⁸⁵ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [about the middle of February 1938], 157.

⁸⁶ *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 373.

something!”⁸⁷) are not met,⁸⁸ then in the world of *The Homeland* events are subjected to logic *à rebours*. Thanks to this logic, a marginalized individual gains the status of a central figure: “From a café player looking for any job I have been swiftly promoted to the first violinist of the town opera; art loving, exclusive circles have opened up for me, I have entered the best circles of society, as it were, on the basis of a right I had achieved long before, I, who up till now had stayed in the half-underground world of degraded existences, travelers without a ticket, under the deck of the social vessel.”⁸⁹ If everyday reality makes the creative “I” constantly question himself and his world, triggering the mechanisms of alienation and devaluation (“I said to myself that I am neither a painter nor a writer; I am not even a good teacher. It seems to me that I have deceived the world with some sparkling wit, that there is nothing in me”⁹⁰), not a trace of this inner conflict is left in the story: “The aspirations that, as suppressed and rebellious claims, lived in the depth of my soul an underground and pestering life, were soon legitimized. The badge of usurpation and futile claims flowed down from my forehead.”⁹¹ For an ex-homeless traveler, pushed to the margin of society and beginning to doubt his own vocation, a new epoch came at last—“the epoch of success and happiness.”⁹² But even in that dream epoch, subconscious shadows of past defeats and losses make the protagonist perform a peculiar ritual for gaining fate’s favor. Owing to the magic power of the word, the new epoch should last forever. This is why he repeats, like mantras, protective formulas like: “The quality of my happiness was of the long-lasting and reliable kind,”⁹³ “My position at the opera is unassailable”⁹⁴, or “The calculation of my happiness is closed and complete.”⁹⁵ In the epoch of happiness everything is determined in advance, predicted, the dynamics of the opposition “old-new” and “margin-center” seem to act in favor of the former “vagabond and homeless,” who has already managed to taste the pleasures of the new situation in his life: “The conductor of the philharmonic orchestra, Mr. Pelle-

⁸⁷ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [February 21, 1938], 158.

⁸⁸ *Wiadomości Literackie*’s award in 1938 was given to Jeremi Wasiutyński for the novel *Kopernik (Copernicus)* (1937).

⁸⁹ *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 373.

⁹⁰ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [November 15, 1936], 133.

⁹¹ *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 373.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 374.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

grini, appreciates me and asks for an opinion in all crucial issues. He is an old man on the threshold of his retirement,⁹⁶ and it is a thing that he, the curators of the opera and the music society⁹⁷ of the town, have agreed in secret that, after he retires, the conductor's baton without any further ado will go to me."⁹⁸ "The epoch of success and happiness" is also the epoch of material affluence, the luxury that he dreamt of: "The opera belongs to the most prosperous ones in the country. My salary is absolutely sufficient for life in the atmosphere of well-being, not without the appearance of some luxury."⁹⁹ The rewriting-compensation of this work makes the narrator mention such "empirical" details as "a few rooms" or "the good smell of a well-heated and cared-for interior."¹⁰⁰ The long awaited affluence, luxury and quietness to live in are the basic topics of lonely meditations that last many hours. The protective mantra serving to maintain the inviolability of the obtaining idyll is their center: "With my head leaning against the window-pane I am standing so for a long moment and I am pondering... // [...] Hours pass. With a hot forehead pressed against the pane I feel and I know: nothing bad may happen to me anymore, I have found a haven and peace. Now a long sequence of years heavy with happiness and satisfaction will come, an endless series of good and blissful times."¹⁰¹ Even more, in terms of wealth, abundance and favor his own eschatological perspective is also considered. This aspect, like all other ones, is subject to obligatory rewriting, that is, getting accustomed to it by means of the magic ritual of repeating protective formulas and meditations: "I stop breathing. I know: just like all life—sometime death, nutritious and sate, will take me in her open arms. I will lie satiated at the very

⁹⁶ In the alternative history of *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)* the position of the "I" is identified as the position of the coming generation, the generation-conqueror. But in the real biography entangled in the incessant struggle with the threatening reality, an utterly different motif of the "lost life" "without a future" is realized. See the letter to Anna Płockier of June 4, 1941.

⁹⁷ It is obligatory that support should be guaranteed by some higher body. This is because legalization on the level of the mechanism guarantees an honest citizen's inner peace and a feeling of safety. This strategy of behaviors is demonstrated in one of the letters to Romana Halpern, in which the subject is the completion of the formalities connected with Schulz's marriage: "I did not go to Katowice. I got the information from there that fictitious registration in Katowice is impossible, for the authorities know about malfeasances that happen, and in the Silesian provinces this may still be done. I would very much like to have it behind me. I very much do not like these problems with the authorities and I cannot deal with them. I am terribly inept in such matters" ("List do R. Halpern" (A letter to R. Halpern) [beginning of November 1936], 132.

⁹⁸ *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 374.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 377–378.

bottom among the greenery in a beautiful, well tended local graveyard.”¹⁰² The strategy of rewriting-idealizing—rewriting in terms of affluence and safety—is also used in the case of the use of the topos, with which the “epoch of success and happiness” is directly connected.”¹⁰³ Designing the vision of an ideal city, a city-safe haven, the narrator uses such terms as: “economic life of a city,” “sugar industry,” “porcelain plant,” “export,” “enterprises,” “industry.” This serves to create a convincing picture of a self-sufficient, stable reality protected from the chaos of “shocks and crises.” Furthermore, the city also represents a certain typology (ideal city—ideal state) that proves that there exists some higher order: “Anyway, this city, like many other ones in this country, is affluent and well developed—fairly prudent and devoted to businesses, fairly keen on luxury and bourgeois prosperity, also fairly ambitious and snobbish.”¹⁰⁴ The sense of being a member of the community of an ideal city where “fate allowed” the protagonist to “find a haven so quiet and blissful,”¹⁰⁵ is confirmed by the privilege of using the pronoun “we” (“our streets,” “our hotels,” “our shops,” “our places of amusement,” “our merchants,” “our manufacturers,” “our businesses,” “our industry,” “our School of Art”), and this, in turn, lets the protagonist join the universal system of relationships with others/strangers (“they,” among whom he himself could once be), already as a privileged person belonging to the community of an ideal city.

The protagonist’s privileged position not only defines the character of the relations inside the community or with the community (“we—they,” “me—them”), but also allows ordering the relationships within the intimate communication (“me—she”). This part of the reality is also subject to radical rewriting-idealization. An attempt at explaining a traumatic experience in a narration, an experience that is connected with the unsuccessful plan of his marriage (the biography level), forces the creative body to consistently draw up an alternative history (the symbolic biography level), in which an absolute defeat (“Unfortunately I have to sadden you with the news that my relationship with Juna has broken down completely. She finally became dis-

¹⁰² Ibid., 378.

¹⁰³ According to Jerzy Jarzębski (*Schulz* (Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1999), 187) in such stories as *Loneliness*, *The Republic of Dreams*, *The Homeland* and *The Comet* Schulz’s myth of the “safe haven” is realized: “In all the stories about growing old and regression, Schulz, in fact, deals with the same thing: construing a defensive place that could serve as a refuge “for eternity.”

¹⁰⁴ *Ojczyzna* (*The Homeland*), 376.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 375.

couraged with my hopeless situation, with the difficulties connected with my moving to Warsaw, that she attributed—quite rightly—to my helplessness”¹⁰⁶) is replaced by a discourse of stereotypic bourgeois idyll. The process of inscribing himself in that alternative (ideal) history anticipates a radical change in the functional field of the actants. If the semantic field of the “I” in the situation “there” and “then” is first of all identified with inadequacy, helplessness, a lack of firmness that infinitely prolong the time and ultimately lead to the defeat of the plan of marriage (“a few years’ period of Schulz being engaged to Józefina Szelińska”¹⁰⁷), in the situation of the idyllic “here” and “now” the expansiveness of the male *ego* that is sure of his victory dominates: “Here is the place to mention the most important fact that concluded and crowned this epoch of success and happiness, that is Eliza, whom I met on my way at that time and whom I married after a short, ecstatic period of engagement.”¹⁰⁸ What does the essence of this astonishing fact that concludes the “epoch of success and happiness” consist of, then? The significance of Eliza results, firstly, from the fact that she belong to the ideal “world-state-city,” in which the act of the ultimate demarginalization of the former “café player” is performed (to be beside Eliza means to constantly confirm being part of that ideal community); and, secondly, from this figure’s unique ability to mediate. First of all, it is the role of a mediator between:

a) the artist’s higher, ideal world and the world of the every day: “The several rooms in which we live were furnished by Eliza according to her taste, since as for me, I do not have any wishes and indeed I am deprived of any initiative in this field.¹⁰⁹ Eliza, on the other hand, has very robust, although constantly changing, demands that she carries out with energy deserving of a better goal. She conducts negotiations with the suppliers all the time, she bravely fights for the quality of the commodities, for the price, and in this field she wins successes of which she is quite proud”¹¹⁰;

¹⁰⁶ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Breza) [April 8, 1937], 57.

¹⁰⁷ See Jerzy FICOWSKI, “Prehistoria i powstanie Sklepów cynamonowych” (Prehistory and Origin of Cinnamon Shops) in: the same, *Regiony (Regions)*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ SCHULZ, *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 374.

¹⁰⁹ It is worth reminding the reader of Brono Schulz’s attempts at furnishing his own room in the tenement house in Floriańska Street. In 1938 the attempts will become one of the main issues in his correspondence with Romana Halpern. See the letters to her of March 10, March 31 and April 17, 1938.

¹¹⁰ SCHULZ, *Ojczyzna (The Homeland)*, 374–375.

b) the unique world, higher in its exceptionality, of the artist and the world of the community, doubtlessly lower because of its unifying collectivism, but indispensable because of its role as a witness and participant in the ritual of the demarginalization of the former “café player”: “[...] there is almost no evening that we would not finish the day in one of our friends’ elegant houses playing a game which often lasts until late at night. Again, the initiative in this matter is Eliza’s, who justifies her passion with the care for our social *prestige* that requires frequently visiting the great world, so that we do not drop out of circulation [...].”¹¹¹ The implicate depreciation of Eliza comes from the same source. Being part of that world-city, that community, Eliza is, as it were, infected by them, she is, in advance, doomed to inferiority, a derivative nature, dependence. Each one of Eliza’s movements, each gesture, is interpreted by the narrator from the perspective of a double code, in a way—of mediation and of negation. From the point of view of a demarginalized, legalized “I,” the life of the creature-mediator (Eliza—the material world) is a life devoid of deeper meaning: “I look at her prudence with a lenient tenderness and at the same time with a certain anxiety, like at a child recklessly playing on the edge of the precipice. What naivety to think that, struggling for a thousand trifles of our lives, we shape our fate!”¹¹² The mediating figure also cannot properly appreciate and use her own presence in the axiological perspective of the time: “[...] and in fact she yields to the charm of that thoughtless, and a little bit exciting, wasting of her time.”¹¹³ The actualization of the negatively connoted semantic fields also affects the modeling of the negative image of Eliza in its essence, which, in turn, results from the conventional, stereotypic interpretation of the universal “male vs. female” dichotomy. According to this interpretation, the sphere of Eliza is a lower, limited, irresponsible, fading sphere: “She is an enlivened game, she is in luck, she is the drunken wine and she is full of little feminine projects. On the basis of a silent convention she demands absolute tolerance on my part for those irresponsible dreams and she bears me a grudge for all my sober and critical remarks.”¹¹⁴ Eliza is a woman, so she should submit to the superiority, irreproachable and holistic quality of the male *ego*. On the explicit level, this dependence is shown in the form of ideally matching steps: “At last we are alone in the night street. My wife matches her flexible, free

¹¹¹ Ibid., 376–377.

¹¹² Ibid., 375.

¹¹³ Ibid., 377.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 379.

step to mine. We agree well and going up the street, with her head a little lowered, she jostles the carpet of withered letters covering the roadway.”¹¹⁵ But on the implicit level, the matching of the steps is a sign of the subjection-conquest of the world, in which “a haven so quiet and blissful” could be found. In addition, in the real biography constituted on the other side of the extracted stories, those subjected to regression, there were similar manipulations. It is primarily the act of the ultimate dethronement of the life partner. The semiotic marker of this act is, on the one hand, the significant change of the name: “I have to share the news with you that Juna (recently I have degraded her back to the common Józia) has been in Warsaw for some time,”¹¹⁶ and, on the other, the absolute depreciation of the former fiancée: “I am just after the final breaking off with my fiancée. My acquaintance with her was a streak of sufferings and hard moments. In the end, I feel it as a relief that she broke off with me for good.”¹¹⁷ If in Schulz’s private correspondence the word only approaches the taming-subjecting of the figure and the events that are connected with her, and, in fact, coping with the traumatic experience, in *The Homeland* she is definitely “appropriated.” However, the question remains, how effective is the process of that rewriting-subjecting of the traumatic experience, the experience of an ultimate and irretrievable defeat.

In Bruno Schulz’s literary hermeneutics and philosophy of literature, the word is endowed with the special power to ontologize reality: to recover one’s own name means to ‘be.’ The word includes the named reality in a universal meaning and gives it a holistic quality and dynamics. Thanks to the unique ability to regress, it also reaches the deepest bottom of the biography, extracting from its mythical mist an alternative, deeper version of history, actualizing the images that have a “decisive significance.”¹¹⁸ So it is not any histories and images, but only those that “spring from that dark land of early childish fantasies, presentiments, anxieties, anticipation of that dawn of life that constitutes the proper cradle of mythical thinking,”¹¹⁹ that constitute a certain “program, an iron capital of the spirit.”¹²⁰ Being a powerful mechanism of semiosis at the same time, they occur as a mechanism of

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 378–379. Most of Bruno Schulz’s drawings are, in turn, examples of matching the steps *à rebours*. Here, a man always matches his steps with the steps of the woman-ruler.

¹¹⁶ “List do T. i Z. Brezów” (A letter to T. and Z. Breza) [November 18, 1935], 52.

¹¹⁷ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 2, 1937], 85.

¹¹⁸ “List do Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza” (A letter to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz), 100.

¹¹⁹ The same, *Exposé o książce Brunona Schulza (An Exposé on Bruno Schulz’s Book)*, 325.

¹²⁰ “List do Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza” (A letter to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz), 100.

its limitation: “These early images delimit artists’ borders of their work. Their creativity is deducting from ready-made assumptions. Later, they do not discover anything new, they just learn better and better to understand the secret they were entrusted with at the beginning, and their work is a constant exegesis, a commentary to this one verse that they were given.”¹²¹ These images and histories create a peculiar space of spiritual identity, they shape the need of constant self-communication. Was the world of *The Homeland* planned within the borders of those histories and images? Does it put into effect the key postulates of Schulz’s conception of the myth and the word? Is the reality of *The Homeland* the reality of the “entrusted secret”? Reading the text of the story inclines one to give a, indeed, negative answer. Primarily, it is the question of experiencing the trauma (the defeat of the “Schulz issue” and the defeat of the “Juna” problem) which is not subject, as it was in the stories *Dodo*, *The Pensioner* and *Loneliness*, to the process of narrative taming, accustomizing according to the basic principle of the mythologization of reality. In *The Homeland*, the traumatic experience, and in fact the whole life catastrophe, is subject to the procedure of radical rewriting, and as a result a completely new text appears, one that offers an alternative version of the events that are not rooted in personal experience (the vision of a utopian “epoch of success and happiness”). At the bottom of the act of rewriting there is the *à rebours* principle: the reality of *The Homeland* is created because of the constant erasure of the basic rules of modeling the presented world that are formulated in *Mitologizacja rzeczywistości (The Mythologization of Reality)*, *Exposé o książce Brunona Schulza (An Exposé on Bruno Schulz’s Book)* or the quasi-letter to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Hence, the world of *The Homeland* is one of “rudimentary,” “mosaic,” “isolated” words unable to be “guides.” Such words, and in fact non-words, anti-words, are far from an act of regression, from “making sense of,” “mythologization” of reality, extracting alternative histories reaching to the bottom of the biography. Creating the world of *The Homeland* is also a transgression of the borders of images stating the “iron capital of the spirit.” As a result of these verbal manipulations, a reality is born that may be described in terms of “negative values,” understood as a substitute for those positive ones, as intentionally creating the impression that “something has a certain value.”¹²² Hence,

¹²¹ Ibid., 101.

¹²² A. TYSZCZYK, “O pojęciu wartości negatywnej w literaturze” (On the Notion of the Negative Value in Literature), in *Problematyka aksjologiczna w nauce o literaturze (Axiological Issues in Literary Studies)*, ed. Stefan Sawicki, Andrzej Tyszczyk (Lublin: RW KUL, 1992), 142. The

The Homeland may be perceived as a departure from the “entrusted secret.” As a result of using the “mosaic,” the “isolated” word and representations that do not belong to the universal dictionary of the “iron capital of the spirit,” a *quasi*-history is created, deprived of a metaphysical depth. So rewriting the individual history of the “I” by means of the *quasi*-word and *quasi*-image dooms the whole self-therapeutic process to an irreversible defeat. The *quasi*-myth (*quasi*-history, a caricature of the author’s previous type of text) is unable to “reach the deepest bottom of the biography,”¹²³ and this, in turn, intensifies the experience of the final defeat. As Michał Paweł Markowski rightly notes: “History could have looked the way that Schulz described it at the end of his life, but unfortunately it did not. Never did “the badge of usurpation and futile claims” flow down Bruno Schulz’s forehead and he never managed to escape from the «underground world of degraded existences, travelers without a ticket».”¹²⁴ What in 1934 is only the question of presentiment (“a pathetic end of everything”¹²⁵), which he confesses to a trusted Other with fear and despair (“I sometimes have a feeling that I will never more write anything good”¹²⁶), now, at the end of the 1930s, receives its apocalyptic incarnation. *The Homeland* becomes the first step towards the “craftsman’s command” (as Jerzy Ficowski puts it) of the word: “Now reality has defeated me and barged into my inside.”¹²⁷ The first and, at the same time, last one, since, with the moment of the publication of *The Homeland*, Schulz-the mythologist does not exist anymore.¹²⁸

analysis of *The Homeland* in terms of the “negative value” differentiates the present study from earlier interpretations, in which the “difference” of the story is considered as a derivative of the complexities of translation. On this topic see: Jacek SCHOLZ, “Oryginał czy przekład? Zagadka tekstu Brunona Schulza ‘Ojczyzna’” (An Original or a Translation? The Riddle of Bruno Schulz’s Text ‘The Homeland’), in *W ulamkach zwierciadła... Bruno Schulz w 110 rocznicę urodzin i 60 rocznicę śmierci (In Pieces of the Mirror... Bruno Schulz on the 110th Anniversary of His Birth and the 60th of His Death)*, ed. Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak, Władysław Panas (Lublin: TN KUL, 2003), 173–183; the same: *Ojczyzna—Die Heimkehr (The Homeland—Die Heimkehr)*, in *Słownik schulzowski (A Schulzian Dictionary)*, 252–253.

¹²³ *Exposé o książce Brunona Schulza (An Exposé on Bruno Schulz’s Book)*, 325.

¹²⁴ *Schulz: dom i świat (Schulz: The Home and the World)*, <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/kultura/schulz-dom-i-swiat/4rtes> (accessed on July 17, 2014).

¹²⁵ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [June 5, 1934], 65.

¹²⁶ “List do Z. Waśniewskiego” (A letter to Z. Waśniewski) [November 7, 1934], 74.

¹²⁷ “List do R. Halpern” (A letter to R. Halpern) [October 29, 1938], 174.

¹²⁸ The interpretation of the phenomenology of Schulz-the mythologist’s death differs considerably from Jerzy Ficowski’s version proposed some time ago (“Druga strona autoportretu czyli podanie Brunona Schulza”) [The Other Side of the Self-portrait or Bruno Schulz’s Application], in the same, *Regiony*, 420–421); in his opinion, the ultimate disaster in Schulz’s world happened

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when, on the other side of one of his self-portraits, he wrote the text of an application to join the Trades Unions of Western Ukraine: "He resigned himself to his craftsman's command of the paintbrush, to the paid treason of art in painting. In writing—he would neither want to do it, nor even knew how to do it. [...] Saying goodbye to the writing that was the meaning of life for him, he could only content himself with the very physical existence [...]. Balancing unsteadily between unwanted duties and the intensifying depression, he did not write a word more. In this way he lasted till the time of the Holocaust that after a few years also claimed him. Then he definitively died. But his first death—as a writer, the death of Bruno the Great, preceded that one by nearly three years; it came in the second half of September 1939. Probably when he was writing his Application-Pact with the Devil he did not yet know that the verdict had already been given."

ON BRUNO SCHULZ'S DEMYTHOLOGIZATION OF REALITY

Summary

This article is an attempt at an analysis of the changes occurring in the area of Schulz's narrative identity that is being constituted. It is assumed that the turning point for Schulz's personal myth was first of all the success of *The Street of Crocodiles* and a number of events in his personal life (splitting up with his fiancée, his brother's death, his health problems). Each of these factors starts to influence, in its own way, the writer's questioning of the possibility to continue writing, that is, interpreting the world, discovering history, "making reality sensible." The success of *The Street of Crocodiles* becomes a challenge that is difficult to respond to in these new conditions. The writer's "brilliant epoch," the epoch of "writing for himself," comes to an end. The "Schulz" issue is in danger of sinking into oblivion. The narrative space is gradually transformed into a space of coping with alienation, division, loneliness. These motifs are articulated in a special way in the stories *Dodo*, *The Pensioner*, and *Loneliness*. If, in these stories, overcoming failure in life is indeed impossible (*Dodo*) or proceeds owing to "sponging off somebody [else]'s life" (*The Pensioner*), or "parasitizing metaphors" (*Loneliness*), in *The Homeland* the rewriting of an individual myth *ab origine* takes place. The act of this "rewriting" is understood as consequently departing from the basic principles of Schulz's literary hermeneutics and philosophy of literature. The reality appearing as a result of this departure is a reality that is not rooted in genuine experience, a *quasi*-reality of "negative values," a reality of a narrative disaster signaling the definitive "death of Bruno the Great."

Key words: Bruno Schulz; personal myth; negative value; regression; rewriting; demythologization; *The Homeland*; trauma; self-narration.

Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz



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