

IRENEUSZ PIEKARSKI

ON BRUNO SCHULZ'S BOOKPLATES*

We'll see—what?
W. Panas¹

1. A GAME OF BLACK LINES

„Black is the element of graphic arts. The light breaks through to the surface in it, overcomes the printing ink, rends the darkness”—Jan Gondowicz wrote in the essay *Grabbed from the Black*. And he added: “Three greatest European graphic artists, Dürer, Rembrandt and Goya in a most literal way struggle with the powers of the night. The graver and acid search for a secret in their works. Revelation is a symbolic meaning of the task they assign themselves.”²

Schulz's graphic works using, among others, the photographic technique *cliché-verre* obstinately defend themselves from “revealing the secret,” they vibrate intimately, cause trouble even at the most fundamental level. What in fact can be seen here? What emerges from the dark? From the play of lines? And certainly I do not mean here obvious errors made by commentators or editors, or interpretation doubts built into any interpretation, but an inherent

Dr. Hab. IRENEUSZ PIEKARSKI—The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Theory and Anthropology of Literature; Associate Professor; e-mail: ireus@kul.pl

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¹ Władysław PANAS, *Bruno od Mesjasza. Rzecz o dwóch ekslibrisach oraz jednym obrazie i kilkudziesięciu rysunkach Brunona Schulza (Bruno of the Messiah. On Bruno Schulz's two bookplates, one painting and several dozen drawings)* (Lublin: UMCS, 2001), 33.

² Jan GONDOWICZ, “Wydarte czerni” (Grabbed from the Black), in Jan GONDOWICZ, *Bruno Schulz 1892–1942* (Warsaw: Edipresse Polska, 2006), 19.

feature of these images. Is the monkey really smiling scornfully?³ Or perhaps it is a copulating midget?⁴ Is the cheek really cut and bleeding?⁵ How many fish-mouthed demons are hidden in the dark of the night?⁶ Are the damned in the death procession urged by some guards⁷ who even carry someone on their arms against his will?⁸

Schulz's drawings, even the small ones, are sometimes whole plots, complicated and turned into a myth. Jan Gondowicz in an intriguing way commented on the self-portraits dating back to the same period as the bookplates,⁹ and earlier Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak and Krystyna Kulig-Janarek penetratingly wrote about *Xięga bałwochwalcza* (*The Booke of Idolatry*).¹⁰ Researchers dealing with Schulz's engravings showed that a detail (e.g. the pattern of the floor, the hair-style *à la grecque*, the headgear), a self-quotation (e.g. Pierrot), mythological reference (conch) have a significant, or sometimes fundamental meaning for the interpretation of Schulz's works. The sophisticated interpretation of his self-portraits of the years 1919–1920 suggested by Gondowicz is convincing, even charming... It is a bit different with his "inversion" reading. The author of *Trans-Autentyk* (*Trans-Authentic*) tries to convince us that Schulz used a certain extraordinary technique, owing to which, after turning a drawing upside down a completely unexpected sight appears. A cat put "on its head" will become a dog, in the sketch of the

³ See Małgorzata KITOWSKA-ŁYSIAK, entry: "Ekslibrisy" (Bookplates), in *Słownik schulzowski* (*Schulzian Glossary*), ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki, Jerzy Jarzębski, Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2003), 100.

⁴ See PANAS, *Bruno od Mesjasza* (*Bruno of the Messiah*), 68.

⁵ See Jan GONDOWICZ, "Piękno adeliczne" (Adelic Beauty), in IDEM, *Trans-Autentyk. Nieczyste formy Brunona Schulza* (*Trans-Authentic. Bruno Schulz's Non-pure Forms*) (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2014), 78.

⁶ See Zbigniew MASZEWSKI, "Bianca Looks from above the Book: Readings on the Margin of Bruno Schulz's Ex-Libris for Stanisław Weingarten," *Text Matters* nr 2 (2012): 137.

⁷ See KITOWSKA-ŁYSIAK, entry: "Ekslibrisy" (Bookplates), 100.

⁸ See PANAS, *Bruno od Mesjasza* (*Bruno of the Messiah*), 54.

⁹ Jan GONDOWICZ, "Magiczna bogini ciała" (The Magic Goddess of the Body), in *Trans-Authentic* (*Trans-Original*).

¹⁰ See Małgorzata KITOWSKA, "Bruno Schulz—A Graphic Artist and a Man of Letters," *Literatura* nr 1 (1978); the same, "Czytając 'Xięgę bałwochwalczą'" (Reading "The Booke of Idolatry"), *Twórczość* nr 3 (1979); the same, "Xięga bałwochwalcza—grafiki oryginalne (clichés verres)" [The Booke of Idolatry—Original Engravings (clichés verres)], *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* nr 43 (1981); Małgorzata KITOWSKA-ŁYSIAK, "Bruno Schulz—'Xięga bałwochwalcza': wizja—forma—analogie" (Bruno Schulz—'The Booke of Idolatry': Vision—Form—Analogies), in *Bruno Schulz. In Memoriam 1892–1942*, ed. M. Kitowska-Łysiak (Lublin: Wydawnictwo FIS, 1994); K. KULIG-JANAREK, "Erotyka—groteska—ironia—kreacja" (Eroticism—Grotesque—Irony—Creation), in *Bruno Schulz. In Memoriam*.

artist's head by means of inversion one may see a grotesque face with a clumsy nose, and in the face of a pious Hassid—Mephistopheles himself...¹¹ So this would be literally: art of perversity. A domain of carnivalization, grotesque, mockery.

These examples show how great imaginative potential there is in those formally modest, often small, frequently sketchy “pictures” (the figures repeatedly lack feet, hands, arms or other parts of the body, including the intimate ones). Well, some people can see the inversion, others—in spite of their good will and efforts—cannot... We want to remain in the area of the intersubjectively verifiable knowledge so let us pass on to a description of Schulz's bookplates.

2. A LITTLE APOCALYPSE: *DANSE MACABRE* WITH A PIERROT, A GIRL AND A SERPENT

Most briefly: a bookplate with a Pierrot looking behind the theatre curtain¹² presents—as Władysław Panas claimed—the scene of the Last Judgment.

In the distance and in twilight naked men and women may be seen, a procession of the damned in front of which the profile of the demon is looming, to a certain degree made up of the recipient's imagination¹³. In the foreground, from the dark a big forearm emerges with a gigantic hand at its end, grabbing a long-haired brunette who is dramatically leaning backwards and is looking—may be beseechingly, and certainly sadly—at a man in striped clothes and with Schulz's face, with a lace ruff at his neck and in a cap, who in this situation is only able to raise his hand to the level of his mouth. Does he want to say goodbye? Is he still whispering something? Is he showing his powerlessness?

I would like to emphasize that the right wing of the curtain has not been cut and it has not cracked¹⁴. Simply the bookplate facing the viewers and the skeleton standing with its back to the stage were wrapped in this half of the

¹¹ Jan GONDOWICZ, “Mrugająca materia” (The Blinking Matter), in *Trans-Autentyk (Trans-Authentic)*, passim.

¹² See e.g. PANAS, *Bruno od Mesjasza (Bruno of the Messiah)* (annex: *Ilustracje [Illustrations]*).

¹³ It was exactly Panas (*ibid.*, 59) who located the demon “in the curve of the woman's bended leg.”

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 50.

now parted curtain. The curtain serves as a mackintosh. In the eye socket of the skull strongly tilted to the side—on the brink of breaking the cervical vertebrae—there is still an eye that is attentively looking at the girl. The skeleton is holding a string, or even is pulling it. It is probably used for drawing the curtain. So it is the end of the performance? Its actors will soon disappear from the sight of the viewers, the helpers and the witnesses of this miniature extermination. They will be devoured by the dark outside the stage. One more moment... However, maybe, something else is going to happen here or maybe just nothing is going to happen. Will the ending be made impossible by the black serpent with threateningly open jaws that is wound round the skeleton's feet? Now it either hangs down motionless, only hissing, or having earlier crawled out of the dark behind the stage it is slowly climbing the "curtain," tighter and tighter holding its bony contents and at the same time... preventing the theater curtain from being drawn. Who is this snake and what intentions does he have? He does not play a supporting role in this spectacle, his function is not that of an ornament like Pan or even Pegasus. Clearly he has something to say. And his open jaws remind of the gate of hell known from medieval mystery plays. Surely he is a herald of the end, and not a herald of the beginning. But does he belong to the same world as the demon-devourer and the hand of the dark? Most probably it is so. On the other hand, it is owing to him that we still can see what is going on on the stage. And as long as we can see the story is going on, the procession is still walking in its slow and nearly unconscious dance of the extermination. The woman is still staring at Pierrot. Although blocking the curtain of history at the same time means prolonging the suffering. Perhaps it is death that is the gift...

And the skeleton? Is it another figure coming straight from hell? A symbol of the ruthless death? Or rather a reflection of Pierrot? His *alter ego*? Extraordinarily strong symmetrization of the whole composition could confirm such a mirror hypothesis. The bookplate looks like a play of reflections, like a geometrical system of parallel figures: the trapezoidal proscenium has an equivalent in a similar apron of the curtain; the lower rectangle of the basis—in the upper rectangle of the "frieze"; the stretched in its rush Pegasus—the longitudinal curtain rod made of a figure that is twisted or wrapped in something; the man leaning backward in front of Pegasus—the woman with a winged horse who is bent forward; at the bottom on the right the girl with a lyre—on the left the violinist; on the top, just below the molding the two symmetrical rectangular plots like theater boxes: in one of them Pan

turned towards the middle, in the other a pair of lovers also facing the inside; precisely in the middle—a small painting with a wide ornamented frame—a black square with a white beauty; the rectangle of the left curtain *versus* the rectangle on the right; Pierrot opposite the skeleton. What is more, some obstinate circularity is inscribed in this composition¹⁵: there is an *ouroboros* with four symmetrically placed rings of its body, there is a hypnotic pattern of the curtain painted in circles, and there is some obsessive poetics of touches in opposition to the “iconostasis” poetics of isolation that is a feature of the bookplate with a dragon.¹⁶ Everything is connected, penetrated (only diagonally the hands of Pierrot and the girl cannot be joined, which may be treated in terms of a significant break of the visual rhythm, of breaking the cohesion, of an exception to the rule). The young man at the bottom gently nudges the violinist with a toe of his right foot, much less gently he leans against the nostrils of Pegasus that is trying to trample him (the horse’s nostrils look like they were deformed as a result of this pressure); the woman touches the pasterns of the winged stallion, and the toe of her left foot brushes the protruding foot of the girl who is playing the lyre. And the snake rubs against the figures in the “cellar” part of the bookplate. At the top the molding and the curtain draped in the shape of a trapezium close everything. Pierrot and the skeleton as well as the curtain itself are a vertical link on the borders. At the bottom the arrangement is fastened together with a low base.

And since the movement goes on around a circle it may be asked if the brunette behind Pegasus, the one with the long blown about hair is not the same long-haired girl who is carried away into the dark (and if it is not her reflection, reduced in size, that we can also see in the crowd of the damned)? Zbigniew Maszewski stressed the similarity of the positions of one of the women in the crowd and the one grabbed by the huge hand. This would be a device reminding of the technique of close-up. Even critics of the interwar period (Stefania Zahorska, Emil Breiter, Henryk Vogler)¹⁷ found that film

¹⁵ Writing about Lilien Schulz (“E. M. Lilien,” *Schulz / Forum* 6 (2015): 87) noted with pleasure that each of his drawings “is organized on the principle of some rhythm that penetrates it across and runs unstoppable like a triumphal fanfare, grabbing and uniting all the details of the drawing with its wave.”

¹⁶ “This bookplate is a bit similar to the iconostasis”—Panas remarked (*Bruno od Mesjasza*) [*Bruno of the Messiah*, 73].

¹⁷ Paweł Sitkiewicz paid attention to it, “Fantasmagorie. Rozważania o filmowej wyobraźni Brunona Schulza” (Phantasmagorias. Deliberations on Bruno Schulz’s Film Imagination), *Schulz / Forum* 1 (2012).

techniques were not alien to the Schulzian literary practice. Henryk Vogler also spoke about the writer's drawings in "optical" terms. It seems that the effect of relocation in the bookplate with Pierrot was also achieved thanks to a linear positioning of the figures who are presented as it were in successive phases of their movement, in frames, like e.g. when the stroboscopic effect is used.

An infrequent form and arrangement of particular elements of especially this bookplate, but also of the erotic sign made for Goldstein¹⁸, may be associated with the shape of a Jewish tombstone. A matzevah often assumes the shape of a rectangle rounded at the top with two "margins" of empty space outlined at the sides, sometimes in the form of columns, pilasters or engaged columns joined by an archivolt¹⁹ (in the bookplate it is a curtain) between which a sacred text is placed (in the bookplate: a "spectacle" with the damned and an inscription). Below the inscription area usually there is a more or less visible base—as far as the stele has not sunk into the ground (the cellar part with Pegasus). I would not take the liberty of making such a general, not very precise or even extravagant comparison—in the case of *Ex Libris Eroticis* indeed blasphemous—if not for Schulz himself, who showed a great sepulchral sensitivity and who in one picture combined the work of stoneworkers and illuminators, and placed it in the context of wood engraving and commercial design. The author of *The Cinnamon Shops* wrote in a sketch devoted to Lilien:

The artistic instinct, f i n e a r t s talents became embedded in people's souls, they flickered with a faint flame bursting here and there in the works of folk handicraft, in beautiful works by Jewish brass-smiths, uneducated i l l u m i n a t o r s of Agadah, in the masterpieces of ornamental sculpture, o n t o m b s t o n e s.²⁰

Although he wrote these sentences nearly 20 years after making protective marks, the motifs of death, judgment, the end of a man's way shown in one of them support the shaky thesis about the tombstone style of at least two Schulz's bookplates (and also of the drawing from *The Weingarten Library Catalogue*).

¹⁸ See e.g. PANAS, *Bruno od Mesjasza* (aneks: *Ilustracje*) (*Bruno of the Messiah* [annex: *Illustrations*]).

¹⁹ See Andrzej TRZCIŃSKI, "Cmentarz żydowski w Szczebrzeszynie" (The Jewish Cemetery in Szczebrzeszyn), *Zamojski Tygodnik Kulturalny* nr 4 (1996); nr 1, 4 (1997).

²⁰ SCHULZ, "E. M. Lilien," 84. Special typeface—I.P.

The appearance of the stage with the curtain in the bookplate with Pierrot suggests another sacred association—with a Torah Ark in a synagogue. A possibility appears of treating the theater curtain as a different one, that is an embroidered *parochet*,²¹ that veils the closet called *aron ha-kodesh*, that is placed between two engaged columns and contains Torah scrolls.

In such a tombstone-synagogue interpretation the bookplates that are presented here would appear as another variant of the story of the mythical Book (a graphic and grotesque, lay and modernist variant), and in principle as its first cryptic image. The inscription, the Sacred Text that Schulz-Pierrot studies in the theatrical bookplate may be, simply, the truth about human mortality (and loneliness), and in the erotic bookplate the truth is revealed about human corporality (or perhaps rather sinfulness). In the drawing in *Catalogue* it is difficult to find out what Pierrot is looking at (what he is “reading”). May be it is an “inaccessible gloriote” on a mountain slope—a space of desire, of non-fulfillment, dream?

From today's perspective Pierrot's striped uniform, nudity, terror and the “prisoners” submissiveness, ubiquitous death to the accompaniment of music, the witness's powerlessness or indifference towards suffering would even let treat this modest functional sticker as a prophetic vision showing the future... However, avoiding this ahistorical prophetic interpretation a supposition may be made that the trauma of World War I influenced the apocalyptic imaging and the stifling atmosphere of this bookplate.

In conclusion it may be said that the bookplate with Pierrot is a little Apocalypse,²² a story about damnation, about the end, but not of the whole world—Pierrot-the viewer-the reader probably will not suffer the fate of the condemned. It is a story shown in a theatrical staffage with the use of the traditional biblical (serpent—woman—sin) and mythical (Pan playing the flute, a flying Pegasus, the Arcadian character of the flirting and making music young people²³) symbolism, with the idea of a circular return, of cyclicity suggested at its borders. This allegoric “mystery of evanescence,” as Jerzy Ficowski called it, where there is a lot of “existential anecdote, classical

²¹ Even the apron of the curtain finds its equivalent in the valance of the *parochet*, in Hebrew called *kaporet*.

²² Exactly this apocalyptic *stimmung* Ewa Kuryluk tried to reveal (*Wiedeńska apokalipsa. Eseje o sztuce i literaturze wiedeńskiej około 1900* [The Vienna Apocalypse. Essays about the Vienna Art and Literature about 1900] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), 7.

²³ However, ambiguity is inscribed in this music. W Panas wrote about the sadistic origin of the pipes of Pan (*Bruno od Mesjasza* [Bruno of the Messiah], 43–44).

symbolism.”²⁴ It is an enigmatic rebus whose “encrypted meaning sends a challenge to exegetes”, as, in turn, Jan Gondowicz wrote.²⁵

3. EX LIBRIS MESSIANICIS ET HAERETICIS

In the other bookplate that Schulz made for Stanisław Weingarten, as Władysław Panas argued, geometry is the semantized element. What do the rectangles themselves inform about, the “empty frames” without the pictures that there are in them? What do formal relations say: the size of the figures, their positions, repetitions, “rhymes”? The author of *Bruno of the Messiah* argued that the rectangles speak about breakdown, fragmentation, but also about the beginning of some, only just germinating new order. They tell the “plot” of a dramatic clash, a collision of two powers. They point to starting points and central places, they suggest where the spring is of power in that “Flatland”, and show how initially the zigzag movement down from the top changes its trajectory in the lower world, in which a square—extraordinary, for it is the only one—is hiding among the rectangles.

The talking space showed the central place of this story, with its foreground figure that may be recognized and named as a result of deduction.²⁶ This is probably... this must be the messiah. But not the one for whom Jewish sages are waiting—the ones shown in Schulz’s later drawings—gathered round the table or at the well. In the bookplate an initial messiah is shown who, according to Jewish beliefs fights against the Evil and will die, but his act will pave the way for the proper messiah. What is more, if we would like to take from Nathan of Gaza’s “baroque” *Treatise on Dragons*, to which Panas refers, something more than just an image of a reptile, and treat Schulz’s bookplate as an *ex libris* or an “illustration”²⁷ added to it, we will have to accept that the savior is... a messiah-sinner, a messiah reminding Job in his suffering. And this paradoxical image of the sacred apostate will lead us for good out of the area of Lurianic Kabbalah towards Nathan of Gaza’s heretical doctrine presenting Sabbatai Zevi as the only one who—owing to

²⁴ Jerzy FICOWSKI, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolicy. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia (The Regions of a Great Heresy. Bruno Schulz and His Mythology)* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2002), 291–292.

²⁵ GONDOWICZ, *Bruno Schulz*, 84.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 83–123.

²⁷ Nathan of Gaza (1643/4–1680)—as Yehuda Liebes wrote (“Sabbatean Messianism,” in *Studies and Messianism*, transl. from Hebrew by Batya Stein (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 101)—is “one of the most profound and original thinkers in Jewish history.”

his soul's properties (today we would rather talk about the Messiah's depressive states)—is able to go down to the lower areas and set free the “fallen” sparks of divinity that are staying there. Anyway what is essential—argued Panas—is that for the author of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* someone appears who struggles against the radical, metaphysical evil. “Let us say bluntly—the extraordinary quality of this engraving consists just in the fact that it shows struggle against evil. Just once in all Schulz's known works someone wages active struggle against an embodied form of evil.” Someone fights against the beast that “was surprised or caught up with during its escape.” It is the beautiful youth who “attacks it from behind; he stepped over its twisted tail with one leg, and the reptile only turned its terrible open wide jaws at him.”²⁸

However, analysis of the position of the paws (we can see, I think, their inner side) and claws will cause that we will see in the reptile rather a saurian sitting on its tail than one turning to escape. The question requires a little good will, but it seems to me that one can also notice an outline of the monster's knees and a little membranous thighs, which presumption only strengthens the conviction that the beast is sitting with legs astride, with its underbelly exposed. And what we were willing to treat as bumps on its back starts looking like... mammary glands... Indeed, it is a strange reptile, non-reptile, one would say: a slithery creature. Symbolic bestiaries are full of various hybrids, so why could not a “reptile-mammal” find a place in Schulz's mythical world? And this is not the end of surprises: on the tail of this “crocodile” another monster is hiding, this time in the form of a demonic head...

The presented correction of the description of the clash with the beast does not change the fact that the youth fighting against the reptile—no matter if it is facing the viewer or if it is sitting with its back to him—may still be treated as an initial savior, messiah the son of Joseph, the one who fights but is doomed to die, because the proper messiah, David's son, has come. Such an interpretation, I will remark in the end, is possible, however, only in the context of the whole of Schulz's work. Messiah may be seen in the youth holding the shield only on condition that we will treat him as an episode of a great story, that we will recognize in him an element of a broader and uniform vision.

²⁸ Ibid., 105–106.

4. POSSIBLE READINGS

The messianic issue is doubtless the native context of Schulz's books. But the question about the sources of inspiration remains open. Especially with respect to texts so esoteric, forbidden, trailed and destroyed by rabbinical authorities as sabbatean treatises or hymns. The heretic *Treatise on Dragons* belonged to exactly this kind of texts. As Scholem pointed,²⁹ knowledge of difficult, cryptic writings by Nathan even among experienced cabalists was slight or superficial, but at the beginning of the 19th century a secret "transfer" was made of his thought to the Ashkenazi mystical awareness. This happened owing to an immensely popular and treated as orthodox cabalistic work *Sha'are Gan Eden* (The Gates of Paradise) published in Korzec in 1803 in Hasidic circles by pupils of Dov Ber of Mezerith. Its author was the highly valued mystic Jakub Koppel Lifschitz from Volhynia (died 1740) who—as Isaiah Tishby proved (in 1945)—was a cryptosabbatean, and his doctrine presented in *The Gates of Paradise* to a large degree was based exactly on Nathan's argument.³⁰

Let us also notice that in 1873 in the daily "Ha-Shachar" edited by Perec Smolenskin in Vienna, the reading of which was a must for all followers of Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment, a current that was opposite to both esotericism and Hasidism) Nathan's religious hymn (or in fact only its three stanzas that were preserved) appeared as a supplement to Dawid Kahana's presentation of Jewish mysticism; it was a work glorifying the power of the messiah who tamed the primary serpent wound round a man's heel. It was, as Scholem suspected³¹, a poetic version of the discursive *Treatise on Dragons*. Kahana's work was reprinted as a book in Hebrew in Odessa; it had two editions, in 1913–1914 and 1926. Could any echoes of this heretical hymn have reached—via either the Vienna monthly or the Odessa book—the author of the *Treatise on Mannequins*? It cannot be ruled out...

Writing about Schulz's vitalistic messianism Agata Bielik-Robson placed the problem of its sources, that is Hasidic cabalistic, in the area of "rumors."³² Is

²⁹ Gershom SCHOLEM, *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, transl. from Hebrew by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 324–325.

³⁰ See Gershom Scholem, *Mistyryzm żydowski i jego główne kierunki (Jewish Mysticism and Its Main Currents)*, transl. into Polish by Ireneusz Kania (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1997), 405.

³¹ SCHOLEM, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 325.

³² Agata BIELIK-ROBSON, "Życie na marginesach. Kabała Brunona Schulza" (Life on the Margins. Bruno Schulz's Kabbalah), in the same, *Cienie pod czerwoną skalą. Eseje o literaturze (Shadows Under a Red Rock. Essays on Literature)* (Gdańsk: Fundacja Terytoria Książki, 2016), 211.

it really so? No doubt some images penetrated Schulz's imagination as it were unwittingly, via osmosis from his circles. After all he lived not only in the (Boryslav) Oil Basin, but also in the (Zhydachiv) Hasidic basin. But already David Goldfarb, not believing in Schulz's completely hollowed Jewishness remarks that although he had not studied cabalistic treatises in Aramaic or Hebrew,³³ he still read in German, maybe even Hassidic stories in Buber's and Rosenzweig's translations.³⁴ In other words, the whole library of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and of later Judaic studies was open for him. Also in the flagship Polish-language publication from the beginning of the 1930's *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej* (*Jews in the Reborn Poland*) a long informative article on mysticism written by Meir Balaban and Jeremiasz Frenkel's essay on Hasidism appeared.³⁵ Shalom, who found the catalogue of the prewar Zionist library of the "Jewish House" in Drohobych, said that in 1928 it had more than 4500 books. "The catalogue contains [contained] information about cabalistic texts, the Aggadah or midrash." Lindenbaum stated that the level of those works "was far away from the level of works by Gershom Scholem and his pupils," but—as he admitted—"it suits [suited] the state of cabalistic knowledge at the beginning of the interwar period, so the works could provide inspiration to Schulz."³⁶

Let us notice, however, that Schulz could know some texts by the later author of *Jewish Mysticism*, e.g. his entry devoted to cabalistic published in the German *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Berlin 1928–1934), his reviews of books concerning mysticism, or translations of Shmuel Josef Agnon's stories published in the monthly "Der Jude" edited by Buber as well as in other German language periodicals, like in the flagship "Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums" in the 1920's.

Schulz's essay about Lilien that is mentioned above shows that he (at least at the end of the 1930's) was keenly interested in the Jewish issues; in the essay he revealed his rather unfriendly attitude both towards the

³³ Although, as Shalom informed ("Lektury Schulza" [Schulz's Readings], *Midrasz* nr 3 (2003), Schulz learned the sacred language. In the years 1927–1928 "he took private lessons of Hebrew from the best Hebrew teacher in Drohobych, Mojżesz Hirszt Sternbach."

³⁴ David A. GOLDFARB, "A Living Schulz: 'Noc wielkiego sezonu'" ("A Night of Great Season), *Prooftexts* nr 1 (1994), 29–30.

³⁵ Majer BALABAN, "Mistyka i ruchy mesjańskie wśród Żydów w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej" (Mysticism and Messianic Movements among Jews in the Former Republic of Poland), in *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej* (*Jews in the Reborn Poland*), ed. Aryeh Tartakower; Ignacy Schiper; Aleksander Haffika (Warsaw: Nakładem wydawnictwa "Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej," 1933).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

rabbinical scholasticism and towards the mystical effusions of Romantic messianism, but on the other hand he favored to a certain degree political and cultural Zionism. It might be generally remarked that at the moment of writing *Messiah* Zionism appeared to him as a Jewish alternative in a world that was becoming ever more radicalized and showed its malevolent face.³⁷

In 1937 Schulz, talking about the outstanding bookplate deviser, Lilien, remarked that “Today, when the bookplate is fortunately out of fashion, when all the snobbism, pretentiousness and nonsense of this artistic absurd have been revealed, we feel sorry for these beautiful works serving so flimsy goals.” Twenty years after he had devised his first bookplate he talked about this art, indeed, in terms of beauty, but also of artistic absurd. The key words of this anti-bookplate speech are: pretentiousness, fashion, snobbism, sybaritism, connoisseurship. Schulz’s whole essay about Lilien has a certain “socialist,” or somehow “community aware” taste; tones of the Zionist collectivism and progressivism can be heard in it. This is why, as it seems, the elitist bookplate, designed for individual use, in 1937 appeared to the author of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* as wasted beauty. In his essay Schulz often wrote about the artist and the nation, about social awareness or imagination, about tribal sources; he mocked the tendency to “misty and vague symbolism,” the ephemeral and doomed to be destructed art of *fin de siècle* with its irrationalism and shallow symbolism. While reading some passages of his sketch about Lilien one may even have the impression that a certain social idea is becoming the messiah.

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Summing up and broadening a little the remarks that have been made it may be said at the conclusion that among other protective marks that were used in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century bookplates devised by Bruno Schulz in the years 1919–1920 appear today as narrative rebuses, engravings avoiding allegoric attributes and characterized by self-intertextuality and egotism. They appear as works that against the background of all the works by the author of *The Cinnamon Shops* are original and significant: in Schulz’s bookplates the first, veiled variant of the mythical Book—this fundamental motif of his later literary works can be seen.

³⁷ SCHULZ, “E. M. Lilien,” 91.

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ON BRUNO SCHULZ'S BOOKPLATES

Summary

The article enters into a dialogue with the interpretation of Bruno Schulz's bookplates made by Władysław Panas in his book *Bruno od Mesjasza (Bruno of the Messiah)* (Lublin 2001). An attempt to understand them in a different (less holistic) way leads the author of the article to the conclusion that in Schulz's plates the first veiled variant of the mythical Book may be seen—of the fundamental motif of Bruno Schulz's later literary work.

Key words: bookplates; Bruno Schulz; Władysław Panas; art of interpretation.

Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz



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