

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

Almost all Schulz events and conferences in Drohobych have one key item in their program: a visit to the Drohobych synagogue. As if Schulz and the famous synagogue at 6 Pylypa Orlyka were one thing. Meanwhile, the complete absence of the Drohobych synagogue in Schulz’s texts and literary imagination is intriguing. This monumental building – the largest of its type in Central and Eastern Europe – did not enter the writer’s imagination even in the slightest way, even though during his lifetime it was – and still is – a very characteristic element of the city’s architectural landscape. It is hard to imagine the real Drohobych without the building with a triangular pediment rising above the roofs of the houses, and yet there is not even a word about it in Schulz’s works. As if the Drohobych synagogue did not exist for him at all. There is no space for other Drohobych synagogues in his writing, too: for example for the one built in Stryjska Street, on the corner, in the Vienna Secession style, and in general for any synagogue, also from outside Drohobych. Was it related to Schulz’s attitude towards the Jewish religion, and perhaps also towards all other religions? One can doubt<sup>1</sup>.

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

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

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

Schulz’s attention was focused on several important architectural points of Drohobych, but – significantly – there was no Jewish temple among them. Interestingly, it is not a synagogue, but a Gothic cathedral<sup>5</sup> that dwelt with great

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The way Schulz referred to signs of Jewishness in his drawings is also characteristic: he created a separate domain for Jews, consistently separating it from the rest of his works. In his illustrations to *The Age of Genius*, he depicted the men of the Sanhedrin in their Jewish costumes, and also portrayed ritual feasting at the Passover table<sup>8</sup>, which Chmurzyński connected with the first version of "Spring" written in 1935, and the rest of the "Jewish" drawings Schulz made for the lost novel *Messiah*. Chmurzyński concluded that the writer's graphic portfolio included "15 items" of Judaic nature<sup>9</sup>. He emphasized that in those works Schulz

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

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

consistently avoided showing his face, perhaps except for his oil painting titled “The Meeting”, in which he might have portrayed himself in a black Hasidic costume. But it is hard to be absolutely certain that the figure of a Hasidic man depicted in the painting looking at two elegant women is actually Schulz’s self-portrait, even though it is quite commonly considered to be so in the Schulz legend<sup>10</sup>. It should rather be assumed, instead, that Schulz never included his own image in drawings with clearly Jewish themes. Many other works prove that he liked to portray himself, though. Also, he scarcely used any clear Judaic motifs in his erotic-masochistic drawings. He clearly removed all traces of Jewishness in *The Booke of Idolatry*. He acted here with absolute consistency<sup>11</sup>. The same rule applied to self-portraits. In them, he avoided props with Jewish connotations to the same extent as in *The Booke of Idolatry*, which, as we can assume, he treated as his export article. It is significant that Witkacy did not see even a hint of Jewishness in Schulz’s drawings, placing his visions close to Goya’s, and not in the context of the biblical iconography of the Hasidic world, which makes us suspect that Schulz simply did not show him anything other than *The Booke of Idolatry* itself (KL 163–164)<sup>12</sup>.

Things were different in prose.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was also the issue of anthroponymy and toponymy, i.e. characteristic naming strategy Schulz the prose writer used in his texts. This strategy relied largely on “erasing” from his stories names and surnames with clearer Jewish connotations. If in his letters Schulz often mentioned such Drohobych surnames as Sternbach, Płockier, Zwillich, Vogel, Halpern, Pilpel, Wingarten, Chajes, then he clearly avoided such names in stories<sup>15</sup>. Analogically, first names such as Rachel, Deborah, Esther, and Sarah were not allowed to enter his prose, and the maid with her beautiful name Ruchla was turned into a hundred times more banal Adela. We will find no David, Abraham, or Isaac among his characters. In the restaurant in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, the waiter is named Adam (O 263) and is compared to the Greek Ganymede. In “Spring”, Bianka mentions Lonka, Antosia’s daughter (O 200). In “August”, the hero’s aunt is named Agatha, his uncle’s name is Mark, his aunt’s daughter’s is Lucy, and his cousin’s is Emil. In “The Dead Season”, the shop assistant’s name is Leon (O 239), and another one’s name is Theodore (O 246). In “Father’s Last Escape”, the servant’s name is Genya, and the uncle’s name is Charles (O 316). In “Solitude” appears Aunt Thecla (O 310), in “Pensioner” Mr. Filer (O 294) and Kathy (O 297), as well as the students Wicky and Simon (O 309).

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Schulz is usually presented as a symbol of multiculturalism or an artistic effect of the multireligious and multinational culture of Eastern Galicia, and his work is associated with the concept of a cultural melting pot<sup>17</sup>. Meanwhile, in his prose, Schulz carried out a literary “ethnic cleansing” of Drohobych – that is, he “erased” or weakened all signs of the Polish-Jewish-Ukrainian local colour of the place and people. As a prose writer, he noticed no Ukrainian colours, characteristic of the moral and social atmosphere of his hometown, or the equally characteristic colours of the Carpathian highland culture, even though he not only wrote about Hutsul culture in a letter to Romana Halpern of March 10, 1938 (KL 101), but also – as witnesses said – he even took great pleasure in eloquently describing the Orthodox Russian look of the St. George’s Church to his students on school trips, referring to some terms taken from... the Hutsul culture<sup>18</sup>. However, he avoided such terms and cultural details in his prose. So he behaved a bit like a writer from interwar Gdańsk who pretended not to see

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

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



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

Neither the onion domes of the wooden St. George's Church, nor Exaltation of the Cross church, nor the type of imagery taken from Ukrainian-Carpathian folklore to which Schulz allegedly referred in his speech, describing the Drohobych Orthodox church to his students on trips, nor the figure of any Carpathian highlander, one of those whom he could certainly see on market days from the windows of his house at the Drohobych market square, made it into the language of his prose and the image of Drohobych created therein<sup>19</sup>. If in *The Dead Season* the character of a "village yokel" appeared, it did not matter whether he was a Pole, a Ruthenian, a Hutsul or a Ukrainian, because Schulz, the prose writer, was not interested in it at all (O 239).

The basic rule of Schulz's prose was to describe Drohobych, but not in the language of the place - especially not the language of the streets<sup>20</sup>. Drohobych *bałak* jargon – a specific local dialect combining various influences and atmospheres – was not allowed to enter the language of *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. The linguistic signature of a multicultural city, the "local" atmosphere, *bałak* as music of Drohobych "little homeland", a sign of *the genius loci*, cannot be heard even remotely in the language of Schulz's prose.

The Orthodox, Ruthenian or Ukrainian color of Drohobych simply did not exist for Schulz the writer<sup>21</sup>. Likewise, no local Ukrainian sounds will be found in this narrative. Drohobych, as it was presented in *The Cinnamon Shops*, in terms of topographic, moral and architectural realities, appeared to be simply one of the Catholic Polish cities of the Second Polish Republic, with a pinch of Jewish atmosphere, beaming with a stylized aura of biblical references. Although there is no synagogue in Schulz's Drohobych, Catholic churches appeared several times in his works<sup>22</sup>, next to the Mickiewicz monument and the Basilian

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

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

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

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

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

In an advertising note on the flap of *The Cinnamon Shops* published by “Rój”, Schulz wrote that in his prose he created “a legendary circle woven from fragments of all cultures and mythologies”, combining “a wealth of cultural elements” with “a strictly private and unique character dim” (OS 62). It is significant that he did not write that he associated this wealth “with a strictly local character”. The post-romantic idea of a “small homeland” or a domestic Galician homeland was completely alien to him. He was neither passionate about the local distinctiveness of the spirit of the place nor the unique specificity of the Drohobych melting pot of languages and cultures<sup>24</sup>. In writing – unlike in drawing – he was guided by an iron rule: “No folklore titbits, no flirting and no local colour” – as he wrote with appreciation for the work of Ivon Andrić (AM 160). He made the Jewishness of space more clear only once in his prose, in “The Night of the Great Season”, where he compared his father to the prophets of Israel, the shop to Sinai, and the customers to the worshippers of Baal. But there, the “traders in silk barrels”

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

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

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

Schulz’s frequent use of words of foreign origin, taken from many different languages, can be explained as a manifestation of his striving for the cosmopolitan character of his prose. This concerned not only the presented world, but also the structure of Schulz’s imagination and his linguistic sensitivity. From a statistical point of view, the number of expressions with connotations outside Jewish culture was much greater in his fiction than of expressions with biblical, customary and Judaic connotations<sup>25</sup>. Schulz did not renounce his Jewishness in this way – such a conclusion would be unjustified; he only wanted it to be only one of many colours in his prose<sup>26</sup>.

Treating the Bible in a similar manner, he eagerly referred to it in his stories<sup>27</sup>. Contrary to popular approaches to the Scripture, for Schulz, the Bible was not a text of universal applicability, but one of many variants of the archetypal, universal Book from which all books on Earth originated. If Schulz talked about his longing for the “messianic times”, he did not mean only prophetic images of the waiting times from the Old Testament<sup>28</sup>, on the contrary: he dissolved the Hebrew Bible in the common genealogy of universal culture, having in mind the time heralded by “all mythologies” (as he wrote in a letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz of March 4, 1936 – KL 73)<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, in a letter to Witkacy, he juxtaposed his own prose in one respect to Thomas Mann’s *The Tales of Jacob*, strongly emphasizing that for the German writer the symbolic basis of the narrative is the Bible (“biblical stories”), while for him that basis was completely different: such a symbolical basis was in the completely private mythology of the fictional family which he invented himself – therefore not the Bible (KL 65). “Second Book of Genesis” in *Treatise*



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

on *Mannequins* sounded as if it had been written a second time, blasphemously revised, heretical, intended to be much better, a truer version of the biblical Book of Genesis, because at key points it innovatively contradicted the spirit of the Hebrew original. *Treatise* referred to the Bible as much as it was written against the Bible. It is significant that in “The Mythologization of Reality”, the Bible was multiplied in an astonishing formula: “The old cosmogonies expressed it with the saying that in the beginning was the word”<sup>30</sup> (O 365), astonishing because it is in the Bible, and not in any “old cosmogony” that it talks about the “Word” that started it all. Moreover, in this sentence, the “word” was written by Schulz with a lowercase letter in a completely non-judaistic spirit, which can hardly be considered a coincidence. Schulz was also amused by transcultural associations – as distant and shocking as the semantic range of Peiper’s metaphor: put Don Quixote in Soplicowo and Robinson a few kilometers from Drohobych in Bolechów (O 230). His narrative imagination was deliberately syncretic to the highest degree<sup>31</sup>.

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

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

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

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

a Polish town with a discreet, unobtrusive admixture of Jewish atmosphere, to which he was truly attached, but preferred not to expose it too much<sup>32</sup>. He was completely indifferent to other aspects of the spirit of the place. He wanted to be a universal writer, which he tried to achieve by universalizing the narrative imagination, accompanied by a simultaneous reduction of the local colour.

This is where he differs from post-Holocaust writers, a completely different spiritual and cultural formation. The Holocaust almost automatically made Central European Jewishness a universal issue. Schulz thought of the Jewishness and Jewish culture of Polish Eastern Galicia as one particular colour of universal culture, which was close to him as the spiritual colour of his hometown and family community, but also – as he felt it – it hindered him in what could qualify as modern processes of the universalization of the literary text, as long as it came to the fore in the narrative strategy. And this is probably why he wrote that the Hebrew Bible is not the real Authentic, i.e. the true Proto-Book from which all books existing on Earth are derived, but only one of thousands of copies of the Proto-Book; that is perhaps why he used the expression: “biblie i odyseje” (bibles and oddysseys) not only in the plural, but also with lowercase letters<sup>33</sup>.

It was the Holocaust that transferred Central European Jews into universal culture. It was the Holocaust that turned them into a universal image of man. There could hardly be a greater or darker paradox. For post-Holocaust writers Julian Strykowski and Isaac Bashevis Singer, documenting the cultural folklore of pre-war Jewish communities from Eastern Galicia as a Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian “little homeland” was not at all inconsistent with the desire to universalize the literary text. For Schulz, it was completely inconsistent with universalization, and he avoided it as much as he could, following the strategy of the simultaneous unveiling and obscuring of Jewishness. Although in the first version of “Spring” he put open emphasis on the Jewishness of Easter, he never repeated this approach in his other texts<sup>34</sup>. No Passover, no menorah, no rabbi, no tallit, no tefillin, no Yom Kippur, no yeshiva, no Purim...<sup>35</sup> Even the world of scents in *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* has been free of any clearer connotations of local Jewishness. There are no smells of bagels, challah, kugels,

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

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

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

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

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

The gap between the pre-Holocaust Schulz and post-Holocaust writers is immense. It was they who wanted to be “Jewish writers”, because for them Jewish meant universal; Schulz, in turn, did everything not to seem like a “Jewish writer”, because Jewishness glowed with the locality of customs, holidays, costumes, rituals, language and place that narrowed the horizon of true literature<sup>36</sup>. And so did Galician “Polishness” or “Ukrainianness”. The Holocaust changed everything here. If it were not for the Holocaust, Schulz would probably be one of several outstanding writers of the interwar periods. The Holocaust brought him to the top of Polish and world culture. The genocide forced many readers to read Schulz through its prism and still casts a dark shadow over him, which probably would not have pleased him at all, because he dreamed of a completely different type of universalization of his literary work and wanted to be at the top for a completely different reason. It sounds like a paradox: he was a private, universal man with an imagination encompassing – as put it – “all mythologies”, which made him neither entirely a Jewish writer, nor a Polish one; he was all the more so as a tragic victim of the Holocaust, ennobled by nostalgic memory.

Schulz considered his Jewish world in Drohobych to be permanent, firmly rooted in the earth, and not in danger of disappearing, even if this world was changing before his eyes under the influence of the economic expansion of capitalism into the highly ambiguous Street of Crocodiles<sup>37</sup>, he saw no reason for a careful, literary documentation of the phenomenon of Jewish-Galician distinctiveness. Post-Holocaust writers invested their strength in the description of the decay and destruction of this world, because they saw in it a world marked by radical impermanence, fragile, with the seed of death in it, which is why it is so valuable to the literary heart and eye. In his prose, there is no trace of a premonition of the end of this world, even if no small number of readers of *The Cinnamon Shops* still want to see these traces there. Like Strykowski, he does not have the basic insight filled with evil tensions, predicting the impending catastrophe of dividing

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

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



the world into Jews and goyim. There is nothing of the marked distinctiveness of Jewish traditional dress and customs, there are no ritual activities in everyday life, prayers prescribed by the Mosaic Law, there are no *Kolnidre* songs. There is no Jewish district of Drohobych as a separate district, although before the war it occupied a separate part of the city. In Strykowski's *Austeria*, the Bible is a source book, in Schulz's case it is a forgery. Old Tag in Strykowski's novel is the guardian of Jewishness, old Jakub in Schulz is a rebellious heretic of Jewishness when he writes the second Bible – in his understanding, better and much more true than the ancient original – called by the narrator of *The Cinnamon Shops* “the second Book of Genesis”. For old Tag, Emperor Franz Joseph is a guarantor of a harmonious and good world, for Józef from Schulz's *Spring*, he is the guardian of the world as a boring prison of rules. In Strykowski's text, the rabbi before reading the Torah bows before the portrait of the emperor, because the emperor is a goy protégé of God, and Austria is the protector of the world. Tag's inn is the ark, and he is like Noah. Strykowski deals with the departure of Jews from their native tradition, the secularization of young Jewish intellectuals, their leftist tendencies or the extreme nature of the religious ecstasies of the Hasidim. For Schulz, these things did not exist. The Jewish-Christian ecumeny is not something he would be interested in. Strykowski, on the contrary, discussed the topic of the friendship of a Catholic priest with a Jew<sup>38</sup> – something completely alien to Schulz. And finally, in Strykowski's text there is that Ukrainian girlfriend of Jewdoch, the lover of the Jewish old man Tag, while in Schulz's work there is not find even a trace of the Ukrainian character of Drohobych and Galicia, even if in his times all servant maids in Drohobych were Ukrainian. His prose also lacks the colours of the language of assimilated Jews, even if that is specifically the language many inhabitants of Drohobych must have spoken at the time. And finally, there is no nostalgic longing for the shtetl from Antoni Słonimski's “Elegy of Jewish Towns”, even if we like to attribute it to Schulz<sup>39</sup>, looking at his literary work (and his drawings) through the dark lens of the Holocaust, which he certainly would not have wanted at all.

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

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