

# Stanisław Rosiek: A Cut-off. Seven Fragments

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

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

A strange dream. Difficult to understand and comment on; it is no wonder, therefore, that it is also difficult for the author to “exhaust” it. The account is unverifiable, too: it cannot be ruled out that Schulz confabulates, knowing that the letter was addressed to Stefan Szuman, a professor of psychology at the Jagiellonian University, author of such books as *O psychicznych czynnikach zachowania się w rozwoju dziecka* (1927) and *Analiza formalna i psychologiczna widzeń meskalinowych* (1930). Schulz wanted to interest Szuman. He met him as a lecturer in Żywiec during summer courses for teachers of drawing. At that time, he was still to make his literary debut. He had certain hopes for Szuman. He counted on his help in publishing *The Cinnamon Shops*. Szuman, in turn, was delighted with the manuscript shown to him by Schulz<sup>2</sup>; in return, he gave him a volume of his (very poor) poems to read. The description of the dream in the letter was a reaction to one of these poems, entitled *Taniec ze sobą samym* [Dancing with Oneself], in which Schulz noticed “the enchantment of one’s own loneliness, cutting oneself off from life, from action,

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

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

the pleasure and tragedy of it” that seemed so close to his own experience<sup>3</sup>. How much truth there was in his confessions, and how much fiction – it is difficult to decide today. But even if the dream described to Szuman – “the most important and the deepest [...], a dream anticipating my fate” – was from the very beginning completely invented, the myth of Schulz’s own beginning constructed in such a way is still worthy of the utmost attention. We are not Freudians, much less Freud himself, to disqualify a conscious, intentional message prepared for use by the recipient. We declare accession to the order of those hermeneuts (that is: suspicious readers) who, without any preliminary assumptions and prejudices, ask about the “symbolic charge” and the “meaningful potential” of the statement. And layer by layer they reveal the meanings hidden in the letter. So let us assume that Schulz consciously wanted others – Szuman and everyone who ever reaches for the letter – to imagine him to be entangled in libido, corporeality, and sexuality in this specific way. Meaning how, exactly?

Michał Paweł Markowski is surprised that “critics rarely refer to this crucial letter”<sup>4</sup>. He is wrong. The dream from the letter to Szuman has been interpreted many times<sup>5</sup>. However, the truth is that no one (not even Paweł Dybel<sup>6</sup>) has conducted a convincing psychoanalysis of Schulz’s dream of self-castration. It would not be easy, anyway. Wojciech Owczarski wisely notes that “the interpretation of this dream – due to the lack of necessary materials in the form of authorial ‘associations’ or comments – seems almost impossible”<sup>7</sup>. I would change “seems” to “is” and “almost” to “absolutely” in this sentence because a message separated – by time and death – from its author, a message deprived of biographical and existential context, cannot and should not be subjected to psychoanalysis. Just the text, the solitary text, has no subconscious of its own (even if it may have its own darkness and depth). The umbilical cord connecting the work of art with “the entirety of our subject matter” – with the “iron capital of the spirit”, of which Schulz wrote that it is “given to us very early in the form of premonitions and semi-conscious experiences”<sup>8</sup> – is inevitably broken. The desire for origin

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<sup>3</sup> KL, p. 37.

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> W. Owczarski, op. cit., p. 103.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first semantic reconnaissance starts from an obvious observation that the dream act described by Schulz is a drastic act of the subject against his natural gender. There is nothing positive in this biological mutilation. By getting rid of his penis in a dream, Schulz does not transform into a woman. He places himself outside the gender dichotomy. He is no longer fully a man, but he does not become a woman because of it either. His self-castration can hardly be considered an attempt to achieve androgyny, an archaic formula of divinity, about which Mircea Eliade, worthy of the highest trust in this matter, wrote: "mythical and religious mentality, before it was able to express the concept of divine two-unity in metaphysical (*esse – non esse*) or theological (revealed and unrevealed) terms, first used biological language (hermaphroditism)"<sup>12</sup>. While presenting his dream in a letter to Szuman, Schulz speaks in biological language, but it is a negative language. He does not become an androgyne, because to be an androgyne according to the mythological model is to combine male gender (which he attacked by removing his penis) with female sexuality – which remains inaccessible, distant, and unattainable for him. Therefore, "perfection and total integration" are beyond the reach of the (self-)castrato<sup>13</sup>. By cutting off and burying the penis in the hole, Schulz does not achieve divine fullness; he does not overcome the

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

<sup>11</sup> T. Olchanowski, op. cit., p. 76.

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

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 416.

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

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

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

## Fragment 2. Drastic confessions

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How much is this drastic confession worth? Not much for Ficowski, since he warns readers against Nacht’s interview: “The scandalous and posturing tone of the *Interview* conducted by an inexperienced debutante, the shallowness and simplistic inclination of the text make it necessary for us to treat it with caution, and not to trust it too much”<sup>18</sup>. But even he, the author *Regions of the Great Heresy*, which read as a highly spiritual text, admits that in this strange, peculiar interview there is “some information that seems factual”<sup>19</sup>. This applies primarily to the declaration about the difference between writing and drawing. It is not just about the “tighter boundaries” that drawing sets for expression compared to prose<sup>20</sup>. Schulz drew attention to them in an interview with Witkacy. In an interview with Nacht, in turn, he imposed a web of shame and openness on his work: “I wouldn’t be able to write a masochistic novel. I would be ashamed anyway, too”<sup>21</sup>. I do not feel that shame is present in his drawings. He is shameless in them – that is,

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

17 J. Nacht, op. cit.

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

19 Ibidem.

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

21 J. Nacht, op. cit.

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

### Fragment 3. Shame and the fissures of literary discourse

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

However, the matter does not lend itself easily to simple interpretations. Schulz's prose is not devoid of eroticism – and sometimes very drastic<sup>22</sup> instances of it. Self-censorship is activated selectively. Generally, the writer has no problem with the sexuality of his characters. Already in the first story of *The Street of Crocodiles*, he presents a gallery of characters whose sexuality is explicit, ostentatious – sometimes even drastically exposed. Among those characters – let us recall the most important ones – there is the animalistic (and semi-divine) Touya, who “hoarse with shouting, convulsed with madness, presses her fleshy belly in an excess of lust against the trunk of an elder” (and the trunk “groans softly under the insistent pressure of that libidinous passion”), and next to her is Łucja, “her flesh white and delicate”, who burns for any reason, thus revealing her “most sensitive maidenhood”; there is cousin Emil, with barely visible, “used up” libido, capable only of passive contact with pornographic photographs, with which he initiates the boyish narrator, and further, in another story, there is the dissolute uncle Charles, “a grass widower [...] battered and bruised by the nightly revels”. In *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, there are characters with clearly defined profiles: the fetishist Szloma (stealing Adela's shoes, dress and beads), the cripple Eddie with “completely degenerate and shapeless” legs, deprived of his crutches by his parents, crawling up the stairs to peek at Adela sleeping at night through the window, and finally Adela herself, radiating sexuality in all directions, and her games with shop assistants...

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Fragment 4. The shamelessness of drawing

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

It was like that already in childhood. Schulz describes the first age of drawing in *The Age of Genius*: "It was a drawing full of cruelty, ambushes, and attacks. [...] It was a murderous hunt, a fight to the death" (134). The world – given to the draftsman as a vision, as a "flood of images" – then passed through his hands "to be renewed" (141). The artist, however, had serious doubts whether he was really the author of his drawings. "Sometimes", he told Szlomo before he stole Adela's shoes, "they seem to me like an involuntary plagiarism, something that was suggested to me, suggested to me... As if something foreign had used my inspiration for purposes unknown to me" (142). Traces of this type of drawings (originary or ontological) can be found today in the so-called "adolescent sketchbook", in which Schulz drew – just like in *The Age of Genius* – "in a hurry, in panic, across, diagonally, through printed and written pages" (133). Another kind of drawing would not start until a few years later<sup>23</sup>.

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

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

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

How to understand these drawings and graphics? How to fulfil the author’s instructions and “feel their content”? You certainly should not start by placing Schulz’s “dark” works in any larger art tradition, nor should you perceive them as deriving from an era defined by Rodin, Kubin and Schiele on the one hand, and by surrealists and artists from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* circle on the other. Rather, they need to be embedded in desires<sup>24</sup> that made them come into being. Multiplication of references to old and new art will at most allow you to understand and describe the language Schulz used to articulate his hidden “I”.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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

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

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

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

### Fragment 5. Emblems of masochism. Compulsiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Establishing a chronology in the case of Schulz’s visual works is usually impossible, and almost always uncertain. It is also difficult to determine what part of his legacy has survived. Therefore, we establish internal boundaries for a fragmentary work, based on accidentally preserved works that do not form a clear course of his oeuvre. However, there is no other option. We are doomed to more or less uncertain hypotheses and intuitive diagnoses<sup>32</sup>. One caesura does not raise any doubts. Most of the 1930s drawings we know today, though filled with eroticism, and focused around the same, masochistic theme, seem different from the erotic emblems of *The Booke of Idolatry* and drawings from the second decade. Generally, these are actually sketches, drawing notes, at most preparatory studies for future work. They have no finish, no signature – they seem to have stopped half-step before artistic finality, as if they still belonged to the artist rather than to the potential audience. It is significant that Schulz did not show these sketches at exhibitions. However, he must have attached considerable value to them, since in 1942, in a situation of immediate threat to his life, he entrusted them to Aryan depositories, who had a greater chance of survival. He must have wanted these hasty sketches to live longer than he did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**33** Letter from Tadeusz Lubowiecki to Jerzy Ficowski .



## Fragment 6. In the procession of perversions

Schulz is not a child of Cain. He does not follow the path of crime. He does not stand up to life, even though he himself does not want to take part in its reconstruction. He affirms it in all its manifestations, even going as far as – as the sentimental legend would have it – to feed flies with sugar<sup>34</sup>. Schulz's sins are the sins of the flesh. Of the two basic types of sinfulness – related to death and killing on the one hand, and to life and fertility on the other – Schulz chooses (?) the latter. His unshakable reliance on the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” is beyond doubt. In the world of his fiction (and in the world of drawings), death is on the defensive. It is an altogether different story with commandments related to the body and it's the purpose they set for it. Sinful aberrations are in abundance here. As a visual artist, Schulz denounced himself. He was a great sinner – notorious and shameless. He was a man who did not seek to procreate. He wanted to be dominated by a woman. He could not hide it. He was a “masochist”. What did it mean? Who was a masochist?

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

**40** Ibidem.

**41** Ibidem.

**42** Ibidem.

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

Schulz knew Freud’s concepts. Traces of Freud’s books can be found in essays and reviews Schulz wrote for “Wiadomości Literackie” or “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”. He may have even met Freud in person during his stay in Vienna, he might have listened to his lectures. For a while he lived a few minutes away from the psychoanalyst’s office<sup>46</sup>. However, it is doubtful whether Freud’s relativization of the sexual norm gave hope to the sinner from Drohobych. One may get the impression that Schulz did not need, and therefore did not seek, absolution or justification. The repetition and ostentation of presenting his image in visual masochistic scenes leads us to see him as someone who walks in a procession of perversions with a kind of proud heroism, with his face uncovered. Much of his work depicts idolatrous scenes in which Schulz – as an icon of himself – plays the main role. No camouflage, no dodging. Schulz, the visual artist, circulates countless testimonies of his masochistic mode of existence.

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

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

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<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 306–307.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 320.

<sup>46</sup> Which is what Joanna Sass found during her research in Vienna.

they are not illustrations to *Venus in Furs* by Sacher-Masoch<sup>47</sup>, which Schulz seems to have sometimes said himself in a defensive rhetorical act; instead, they are a masochistic expression of their very author. For Schulz, masochism (as practiced in his multiple idolatry scenes) was not an artistic theme taken over from tradition or other artists, such as Rops or Klinger. Instead, it was a personal confession, engaging the deepest layers of his “I” and bringing out these “dark fluids” that he wrote about in the interview with Witkacy<sup>48</sup>.

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

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

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

**48** KL, p. 107.

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

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



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

It would be good to know the whole letter<sup>52</sup>, from which the quoted fragment comes. It would be even better if you could read it in the original but this fragment, mediated by a double translation, is of incredible importance. This is a confession made by a mature man and a mature artist who already knows himself and his situation – in the body, in the real world, but also in the imaginary world. His work grows from the deepest layers of “I”, which – I would like to point this out – was formed under the influence of “deviation from the norm”. Schulz accepts this abnormality because he founded his worldview on it. But also because his entire work grows from it.

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

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

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

**53** *Ibidem*, p. 164.

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

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

Efforts by education authorities to obtain this type of opinion before hiring a teacher at a school were not unusual. Therefore, no special procedure was applied to Schulz. In accordance with applicable regulations, leader Siara inquired about Schulz in his environment. As you can see, the artistic work of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*, which was already known to some at that time thanks to exhibitions<sup>55</sup>, did not negatively affect his reputation. On September 3, 1924, he started working at the junior high school as a teacher of drawing. Even the subsequent scandal caused by his “pornographic” (a term used by a Christian Democracy senator) drawings exhibited a few years later in the Spa House in Truskavets did not prevent Schulz from being promoted to full-time teacher in 1929. It seems that what mattered to the School Board of Trustees was not Schulz’s masochistic manifestations in drawings but – as one of the letters on this matter put it – his “moral and political behaviour”<sup>56</sup>. And there, nothing reprehensible was found in Schulz’s everyday conduct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>57</sup> A. Chciuk, *Ziemia księżycowa*, p. 78–79.

<sup>58</sup> RWH, p. 136.

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



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

a lot of consent for myself”, she writes in her diary on September 10, 1933<sup>60</sup>. In January of the following year, after Schulz left Zakopane, where they spent a few days together, she concluded: “I respond to his most vivid needs, I expose myself to his adoration all grateful and nice, I don’t forbid him from deifying me [...]. If not everything is said in an erotic way, the psychological bond seems to be solid. Long roads and conversations in snow and sun, the vast luxury of exchanging thoughts, amidst the miserable poverty of life, blocked and narrowed on every side”<sup>61</sup>. The next act takes place in April. After Schulz’s week-long stay in Warsaw, Nałkowska writes: “I didn’t think it would happen. But I’m calm. I applaud this choice of mine or this fate. Parting again”<sup>62</sup>. Hanna Kirchner, Nałkowska’s biographer, supposes that “during this week there must have been an ‘erotic addition’ to this closeness with the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*”<sup>63</sup>. Letters are now coming from Drohobych continuously “with the old quiet sweetness, shy delight, happy with admiration” – notes their addressee and states: “But I am no longer in this place”<sup>64</sup>. Nałkowska’s emotions are directed towards Bogusław Kuczyński. The diary entry from May 19, 1934 (written after she had received a bouquet of flowers from Schulz from distant Drohobych) leaves no doubts – the affair was over. When writing about her relationship with Schulz, she used the past tense: “I am obviously not the content of his existence in the degree that his letters and his beautiful words seem to suggest. It was not even called love. It was rather a form of cult, a proclaiming of my glory. And it wasn’t because of my qualities, or not only from them – but coming from his nature, craving humility and total abandon in adoration, and here finally finding an objective justification (in my “perfection”) of these sinful desires, an opportunity to express them in a higher erotic sphere. [...] With all the sadness that this sudden injustice is causing me, right now, after a year of this matter, and after that single night together – so unexpected, I would hardly want to mention my fear, growing more dangerous as the days pass”<sup>65</sup>. And that is it. The thing was over.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Irena Kejlin-Mitelman presents her meeting with the author of *The Booke of Idolatry* in a different vein. In a letter to Ficowski<sup>66</sup>, written years later, she returns to what happened in 1923 (or 1924). She met Schulz a year or two earlier in Kudowa, where she was undergoing treatment with her mother. The described scene takes place in the Kejlin's apartment in Warsaw. Schulz – persuaded by Irena's mother – agreed to portray the entire family. After painting the parents, it was the daughter's turn to sit for portrait. Irena was thirteen or fourteen years old at the time. She looked even younger (yet Schulz's portrait showed her as a sixteen-year-old)<sup>67</sup>. The girl was to be depicted in the painting with a red rose. The artist did not like the prop. "Bruno – as she recalls – decided to replace the red rose I was holding with a lilac, which had just started to bloom, as it seemed to him more suitable 'for such a little girl'. He repainted the flowers, but he was not sure of his hand, so he balanced the painting in an oval frame on the easel and I sat at his hand. Mom went out to a meeting somewhere. Suddenly Bruno put down the palette, kneeled in front of me, leaned down and kissed my legs, somewhere near the fetlock, motionless. Only the hands lived an independent life and glided higher and higher up the calves until they reached my knees. From the very first moment I froze so much that I didn't even let the lilac out of my hand. It was my first encounter with a man – not only the first of its kind, but the first ever. But when I felt his hands under my dress, I jumped to my feet. A terrible thought went through me – not fear, I wasn't afraid of Bruno – the thought that Bruno would discover that I, a grown-up girl, am still wearing warm, woollen panties in the spring. I jumped, there were no hands, there was no mouth. Bruno stayed on all fours on the carpet. Drawing N° 8 in *Druga jesień*<sup>68</sup> is a precise, almost photographic reflection of his position and face at that moment. Only that it is not this contemptuously predatory woman who is walking away from him, it is a frightened little girl with unfashionably rosy cheeks. I was mentally developed, but not sexually, without a hint of flirtatiousness"<sup>69</sup>.

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

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

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

**69** Manuscript in the collections of the Ossolineum in Wrocław.

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

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

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**70** Ibidem (emphasis – SR).

**71** Ibidem.

**72** Ibidem.

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

**74** Ibidem.

Alicja Mondschein-Dryszkiewicz, the author of the last testimony in this short review, “was by no means a shy girl”<sup>75</sup>, when she first encountered Schulz. Their peculiar encounter, in which she was to play a special role, had been staged by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Who was she? Alicja, then twenty-something, even though she belonged to Witkacy’s circle of close friends, is now almost absent from biographies and chronicles of his life<sup>76</sup>. She is also practically unknown in the world of schulzologists. And yet – as literary gossip holds – Witkacy even wanted to match her with Schulz. She considered herself a friend of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*. And I guess she indeed was.

She talked about her first meeting with Schulz many times<sup>77</sup>. However, it seems that she left no written testimony. Jerzy Pomianowski took her place, being aware that “she should tell this story”<sup>78</sup>. Pomianowski claims that he heard her account in 1939, when he was spending his last vacation before the war in Zakopane. Invited by Witkacy, he listened to the “grand conversations” he organised in the evening. “These conversations – he recalls years later – were attended by the beautiful Alicja Dryszkiewicz. [...] She had only two tasks: to make sure that the glasses were neither full nor empty, and secondly, to burst out laughing every five minutes without depending on the topic of conversation”<sup>79</sup>. One day – Pomianowski continues – Witkacy and Dryszkiewicz disappeared. They came back the next day and then:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**79** Ibidem.



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

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

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

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

In 1939, Alicja Mondschein married Captain Dryszkiewicz and soon after her daughter Ewa was born. It is difficult to imagine that in this situation she would be willing to take part in one of Witkacy’s projects. Witkacy’s most lively contacts with Miss Mondschein – as can be seen from his letters to his wife – were between 1934 and 1937<sup>81</sup>. And that was probably when her first meeting with Schulz took place. It is also unlikely that Witkacy would have dragged her all the way to Drohobych. The place of his sadomasochistic staging was rather Zakopane. This is proven by the trace left – on paper! – by the heroine of the event in a letter to Henryk Bereza. Unfortunately, this is a trace that refers to some earlier trace (which we do not know, really): “I probably have written to you before on how and why I met Witkacy and Bruno Schulz. What was my first meeting with Bruno Schulz like – and the next two weeks or a week later – what Witkacy demanded of me – and what were Witkacy’s intentions towards me – by sending Bruno to the house where I lived with my little dog, Puszka – alone? Why did Witkacy demand that I put my very high heels – while I was always barefoot around the house?! And I would rather wear sandals. I thought that Witkacy was preparing some ‘toomfoolery’ for me, a game that he loved to do – again, often drawing me in!”<sup>82</sup>. Perhaps the letter to which she refers has been preserved

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>83</sup> S.I. Witkiewicz, *Wywiad z Brunonem Schulzem*, OP, p. 471.

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

<sup>85</sup> Letter from October 15, 1992.

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

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

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

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



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