

Piotr Sitkiewicz: Bruno, Son of Franz

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

28 A. Prędski, op. cit., p. 2.

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

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

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

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³¹ E. Prokopówna, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

38 E. Prokopówna, op. cit., p. 93–94.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

50 Ibidem, p. 290.

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

52 Ibidem, p. 295.

53 Ł. Musiał, op. cit., p. CCVII.

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

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

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

⁵⁵ R. Fieguth, op. cit., p. 303.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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