

# Tymoteusz Skiba: Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz. Parallel Biographies

## Witold Gombrowicz

Prose writer, playwright, essayist. Friend of Bruno Schulz.

Manager of immaturity, master of ridiculous, caricatured mental machinery, demonologist of culture, fierce tracker of cultural lies, positivist and worshipper of fact, master of relativism and believer in concreteness, noble Toreador, future dragon slayer and material for a great humanist<sup>1</sup>.

In the 1930s, he was a regular visitor to literary cafés in Warsaw, such as Ziemiańska and Zodiak, which he might have taken Schulz to. During their discussions, he acted as “Socrates, who dialectically ‘tripped up’ everyone and everything”<sup>2</sup>, making ironic comments making poses, mocking, provoking, exposing the weaknesses of his interlocutors, and shattering trivialities and conventions – both in life and in literature. With the Skamandrites, he assumed the pose of a simpleton, and with Witkacy he pretended to be a great aristocrat. He turned his life into theatre. He was a champion at making faces. He claimed that his ambition was to write a play purely for facial expressions, without any words, and he was eager to show what such a play could look like<sup>3</sup>. Many writers avoided his table at the cafés – for instance, Adam Ważyk, who recalls that he only talked to him once about something important. When Gombrowicz asked him about the best contemporary writers, Ważyk mentioned Iwaszkiewicz and Nałkowska, to which Gombrowicz allegedly replied: “What? This is paper, artificial literature. The only outstanding contemporary writer is Bruno Schulz. He creates his own, unique world. This is new, unlike anything else”<sup>4</sup>.

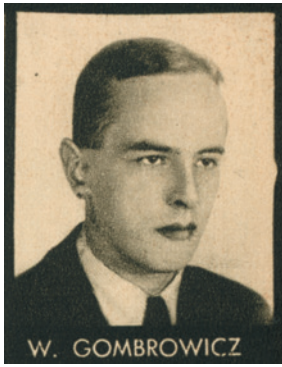
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1 Schulz used such terms to refer to Gombrowicz in his texts.

2 T. Breza, “Jak pojawili się Witold i Bruno”, in: idem, *Nelly o kolegach i o sobie*, Warszawa 1983, p. 369.

3 J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, Gdańsk 1992, p. 211.

4 Ibidem, p. 226.



"Polish writers whose first novels were published by 'Rój'" – Witold Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz.  
Photos from the catalogue, 1938

## Friendship with Schulz

Schulz and Gombrowicz were definitely friends, even though they were apparently not interested in the private lives of each other. They were mainly interested in topics related to art and literary life. Schulz disregarded personal topics, but “brought from Drohobych an insatiable desire for spiritual and intellectual coexistence”<sup>5</sup>. Gombrowicz was interested primarily in intellectual friendship: “Schulz was an extremely close person to me, we talked for hours about the issues of art that fascinated us, and yet I was a hundred times closer to my first cousin from the countryside, I was not interested in Schulz’s private existence; to me, he was consciousness and sensitivity *in abstracto*”<sup>6</sup>. There is certainly a lot of exaggeration in Gombrowicz’s words. In his letters to family, in memoirs, as well as in scraps of the writers’ private correspondence that have survived to this day, you can find traces of mutual care and affection: “Dear Bruno, it was a great weight off my mind to hear your well-being improved. May this positive spell last”<sup>7</sup>.

### 1933: *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* and *Sklepy cynamonowe*

They both made their debuts in 1933, at the same “Rój” Publishing Society, with collections of short stories, the publication of which had to be half paid for by their families. *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* [Memoir from Adolescence] was financed by Witold Gombrowicz’s father, while *Sklepy cynamonowe* [The Cinnamon Shops] by Schulz’s brother. Both books, different and unique, also had a common denominator – they uncompromisingly dealt with both conventional reality and realist literature, using fantastic motifs, mystification, irony, and elements of the grotesque. Despite the similarities, the status of two debutants in the literary environment was different. Schulz entered literary salons and was appreciated, “the elite knew and respected him”<sup>8</sup>; many positive, detailed reviews of his work were published, and he himself could publish further stories – while Gombrowicz felt “disrespected and ridiculed”<sup>9</sup>. This state of affairs has been analysed by Klementyna Suchanow. Here is one observation she made: “Schulz’s debut, reviewed by the same critic, Leon Piwiński, takes two full columns in

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<sup>5</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie. Wędrówki po Argentynie*, Warszawa 1990, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, list od Witolda Gombrowicza, no. III 10, p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz. Ja, Geniusz*, vol. 1, Wołowiec 2017, p. 241.

‘Wiadomości Literackie’, and is accompanied by a strikingly large self-portrait of the writer, while the review of *Memoirs* is an incomplete column sandwiched between five others, the space of which is also taken up by the advertising below”<sup>10</sup>.

### 1934: First meetings at Służewska and Chocimska

It is not known for certain how they met. Gombrowicz recalled that it was probably Schulz who called him: “He’s read my *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania* and would like to talk to me”<sup>11</sup>. *Pamiętnik* was published at the turn of April and May 1933, but the writers met after the publication of *Sklepy cynamonowe*, probably in the first half of 1934, in Gombrowicz’s apartment at ul. Służewska 3<sup>12</sup>. This is how their meetings, discussions and conversations began, which they “usually enjoyed walking”<sup>13</sup>. Gombrowicz recalled years later: “It’s funny to think that when poor Bruno Schulz visited me in ul. Służewska, the two of us were already authors of books that were to become famous in Europe”<sup>14</sup>. During the first meeting, Schulz allegedly expressed his admiration for *Pamiętnik*: “What a volume! I am dazzled by your short stories... I couldn’t produce anything like this myself”<sup>15</sup> – this assessment was also repeated later, among others in a letter to Zenon Waśniewski of January 28, 1935 (“great – *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania!*”)<sup>16</sup> and to Romana Halpern on November 29, 1936: “Gombrowicz is a very interesting writer, one of the most interesting. Do you know his *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*? Please read it – it’s a great book”<sup>17</sup>.

Initially, Gombrowicz did not trust all the reassuring comments from Schulz, who, in his opinion, also lavished praise on others, but he soon found out that these words spoken during the first meeting were not only sincere, but also the beginning of their friendship. “No one has ever shown me such generous friendship



<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 240–241.

<sup>11</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> The Gombrowicz family had lived in ul. Służewska since 1911. It was a spacious apartment with eight rooms on the second floor of the tenement house. The building does not exist today, and ul. Służewska was rebuilt in a slightly different location. In mid-1934, the family moved to ul. Chocimska 35. The mother and sister took up a four-room apartment on the first floor, Gombrowicz moved to a smaller, two-room apartment without a bathroom, only with a tap and a sink – guaranteeing independence, but at the same time located next to his mother’s place, where he could get dinner and use the bathroom. The apartment was located at number 15. See K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, chapter: “Służewska 3” and “Chocimska 35”; J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 182–188.

<sup>13</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1969*, Kraków 2013, p. 655.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, oprac. J. Margański, Kraków 2019, p. 311.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 39, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

and supported me so zealously”<sup>18</sup> – he recalled in 1961. Gombrowicz repeatedly emphasized that such selfless support in the literary community was something unheard of – and that he himself was unable to repay Schulz. That is not entirely true. According to Aleksander Fiut, “from the very first moment they noticed each other and appreciated each other’s talents and greatness”<sup>19</sup>. Gombrowicz expressed this many times<sup>20</sup>. Years later, he called him “the most excellent artist of all those had met in Warsaw”, “the most European artist, with the right to sit among the highest intellectual and artistic aristocracy of the continent”, and his prose seemed to him “creative and immaculate”<sup>21</sup>; he added, though, after a while that the high form he had developed, together with great respect for art and certain perversions limited him like an ivory tower<sup>22</sup>.

Even before moving to the apartment in ul. Chocimska, probably in the summer of 1934, Gombrowicz organized a party, to which he invited many artists and writers, aristocrats and bohemians. He welcomed guests and proudly showed them around the tenement house in ul. Służewska<sup>23</sup>: “He was proud of his apartment. ‘My Biedermeiers, my Simlers’ – he showed them around like a tour guide”<sup>24</sup>. Schulz was also among the guests. According to Tadeusz Breza, he felt a bit uncomfortable in the huge rooms of this apartment. He was tired but at the same time stunned by the noisy atmosphere of the party. Finally, he lay down on the couch and kept saying “What an orgy!”<sup>25</sup> – though in reality there was no orgy.

### 1934–1935: Bruno, Witkacy and Gomber

Together with Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Schulz and Gombrowicz were the most original literary personas of the interwar period in Poland. Their works were revolutionary, and at the same time difficult, incomprehensible and “standing in opposition to Polish literary life”<sup>26</sup>. They did not form any literary group,

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**18** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

**19** A. Fiut, “Pojedynek o doktorową z Wilczej”, in: *Czytanie Schulza. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej Bruno Schulz – w stulecie urodzin i w pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci*. Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków, 8–10 czerwca 1992, pod red. J. Jarzębskiego, Kraków 1994, p. 152.

**20** See among others, Gombrowicz’s article in “Kurier Poranny” of November 5, 1935, reprinted in: Witold Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych. Trudna literatura i pro domo mea”, in: idem, *Varia 1. Czytelnicy i krytycy. Proza, reportaże, krytyka literacka, eseje, przedmowy, wstęp* W. Bolecki, Kraków 2020.

**21** Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

**22** Ibidem, p. 94.

**23** Tadeusz Breza, in his memoir from 1969, writes about ul. Natolińska because the former ul. Służewska, together with the Art Nouveau tenement house number three where Gombrowicz lived, no longer exists. The completely destroyed street was rebuilt in a slightly different place.

**24** T. Breza, “Jak pojawili się Witold i Bruno”, p. 369.

**25** Ibidem.

**26** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

or have a common artistic program – and yet they all enjoyed the attention of the public in the interwar period and of literary historians in later years. “We were, after all, a trinity” – Gombrowicz summed up, calling Witkacy a desperate madman, Schulz a drowned madman, and himself a rebellious madman. This catchy, seemingly gimmicky classification was an attempt to determine their unconventional (“mad”) attitude to form: Witkacy’s tragedy, Schulz’s abandon and Gombrowicz’s rebellion.

Schulz organised their first meeting in 1934<sup>27</sup>, leading Gombrowicz to Witkacy’s apartment in ul. Bracka<sup>28</sup>. The door was opened by a figure with the stature of a dwarf, who began to grow in size before their eyes. It was actually the host who crouched down and slowly rose up. Gombrowicz was quite critical of both such pranks and the character of Witkiewicz as a whole. He saw him as a man of extraordinary intelligence, but also a boring and tiring egocentric, in whom his own flaws were reflected “as in a crooked mirror, monstrous and bloated to apocalyptic proportions”<sup>29</sup>. Witkiewicz also treated Gombrowicz (whom he called Des Gombres) rather warily. Nevertheless, they kept in touch. In 1935, Witkiewicz even showed him the manuscripts of his plays, and Gombrowicz publicly considered them the most interesting texts he had read around that time – next to Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Nałkowska’s *Granica*<sup>30</sup>.

Schulz met Gombrowicz and Witkiewicz several times during the Christmas break at the turn of 1934 and 1935. He was then in the capital with Józefina Szelińska, who recalled that they spent time “in the company of his relatives and friends who were delighted with Bruno: Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz and Breza”<sup>31</sup>. Schulz spent New Year’s Eve in the Witkiewicz’s family apartment at ul. Bracka 23. That evening, Witkacy painted portraits of his guests, Tadeusz and Zofia Breza, and he wrote an obscene poem dedicated to Schulz<sup>32</sup>. Late in the evening, Tadeusz Breza, and, most likely, Schulz and Witkacy, too, went to a party organized by Gombrowicz: “I organized an artsy binge in my mother’s apartment

**27** Klementyna Suchanow claims that it was December 1934, see *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 267.

**28** It was the apartment of Witkacy’s wife, Jadwiga Witkiewiczowa, and also his Warsaw address, where he most often spent spring and autumn (he stayed in Zakopane in summer and winter). His studio and the famous “museum of horrors” were in ul. Bracka. Apparently, a company of portrait makers also operated there: “St. I. Witkiewicz Ltd announce their arrival in Warsaw in ul. Bracka 23 apartment 42, telephone 227-18, call 10-1”, see J. Witkiewiczowa, “Wspomnienia o Stanisławie Ignacym Witkiewiczu”, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy do żony (1936–1939)*, appendix J. Witkiewiczowa, przygotowała do druku A. Micińska, oprac. i przypisami opatrzył J. Degler, Warszawa 2012, p. 572–573.

**29** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 93.

**30** *Jaką najciekawszą książkę przeczytałem w r. 1935. Ankieta tygodnika “Prosto z mostu”*, “Prosto z Mostu. Tygodnik literacko-artystyczny”, 2 lutego 1935, no. 5 (59), p. 5.

**31** Letter from Józefina Szelińska to Jerzy Ficowski. Quoted after: J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia, Sejny 2002*, p. 325.

**32** See S. Okowicz, *Śliwka i tacet. O spotkaniach Schulza i Witkacego*, „Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016.

in ul. Chocimska [...]. The party lasted until six in the morning and was a visible sign of how firmly I had established myself in the Warsaw literary world. I don't remember anymore who was there, but in any case Breza, Mauersbergers and Tonio Sobański must have been there, as well as Rudnicki and probably Choromański. There was a brotherhood of drunks led by Świątek Karpiński and 'Minie', i.e. Janusz Minkiewicz. There were various actresses, as well as Zdzisław Czermański, Kanarek (today a famous painter in the United States)... and maybe Witkacy and probably Bruno Schulz..."<sup>33</sup>. After returning to Drohobych, on January 28, 1935, Schulz wrote to Zenon Waśniewski: "In Warsaw I made a lot of interesting acquaintances: Witkacy, T. Breza, Wittlin, Czechowicz, Gombrowicz (excellent *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania!*)"<sup>34</sup>.

### 1935: Illustrations and compliments

Gombrowicz recalled that Schulz often visited him in the apartment in ul. Służewska, and later also in ul. Chocimska: "He was an inconspicuous man and I'm afraid no one would look at me and him and realise how powerful giants of world literature were in front of them"<sup>35</sup>. It was probably during these meetings that the idea for Schulz to illustrate Gombrowicz's works arose. However, between February and March 1935, Schulz wrote to Waław Czarski – the editor-in-chief of "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" – that Gombrowicz had not sent him the promised text to be illustrated. It was probably supposed to be the short story *Tośka. Fragmenty*, which was published on July 14, 1935 in "Tygodnik"<sup>36</sup>, or a fragment of *Ferdydurke*, which was published in the July issue of "Skamander"<sup>37</sup>. The idea of Gombrowicz's works illustrated by Schulz materialised two years later, with the book edition of *Ferdydurke* of 1937.

Gombrowicz valued *The Street of Crocodiles* very highly, which he admitted publicly – for instance, in "Kurier Poranny", where on November 5, 1935, the article "O myślach chudych" [Of Lean Thoughts] was published, which was a response to Ignacy Fik's accusations of excessive allegiance to Michał Choromański and the group of penmen surrounding him<sup>38</sup>. On this occasion, Gombrowicz

**33** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 85.

**34** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Zenona Waśniewskiego, no. I 39, p. 83.

**35** W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 279.

**36** The story is printed without illustrations, see W. Gombrowicz, *Tośka. (Fragmenty)*, "Tygodnik Ilustrowany", 14 lipca 1935, no. 28, p. 556–557.

**37** The fragment is illustrated with one drawing by Feliks Topolski; it was certainly the editor's choice, not Gombrowicz's, see W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, "Skamander. Miesięcznik literacki", lipiec 1935, p. 264–284.

**38** Gombrowicz argued with the article by Ignacy Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, "Tygodnik Artystów", 23 lutego 1935, no. 15, p. 1–2.

MIESIĘCZNIK LITERACKI

# STUDIO

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WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

## LIST OTWARTY DO BRUNONA SCHULZA

Mój dobry Bruno,

Bogusław chce abyśmy pisywali mu w *Studio* — czy nie lepiej jednak sobie pisać w *Studio*? — a najlepiej chyba do siebie pisywać? — tak, do siebie wzajem pisać najprzyjemniej, o ileż rozkoszniej wystrzelić, celując w konkretną osobę, niż strzelać w przestrzeń okólnikiem, adresowanym do wszystkich, zatem do nikogo. Długi czas myślałem, jaką by tu myślą wystrzelić w Ciebie, dobry Bruno, lecz na żadną nie mogłem wpaść, aż dopiero wczoraj wpadłem na myśl żony pewnego doktora, spotkanej przypadkowo w osiemnastce. — *Bruno Schulz* — powiedziała — *to albo chory zboczeniec, albo pozer; lecz najpewniej pozer. On tylko udaje tak.* — Powiedziała — i wysiadła — bo akurat tramwaj przystanął przy Wilczej.

Strzelam więc w Ciebie myślą tej kobiety. Notyfikuję publicznie, oficjalnie i formalnie Twej osobie, iż żona lekarza ma Cię za wariata, lub pozera. I wyzywam, abyś zajął stanowisko wobec żony. Oto gdzieś na Wilczej mieszka połowica specjalisty o której wiesz już, co myśli o Tobie. Tam, na Wilczej, mieszka, tam żywi ten swój sąd ujemny, tam rozpowiada go przygodnie znajomym, którzy wierzą jej na słowo. Tam, na Wilczej, na Wilczej, Bruno, pod sto drugim urasta i toczy się ta przykra opinia, myśl nieprzychylna bardzo stanowczej w swych sądach członkini szerokiach



complimented his friend: “Here is a writer of the highest class in Poland, without exaggeration, truly the highest... an artist to the core, whose *The Street of Crocodiles* provided me with the true delight of the elite, both ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’. An worker, absorbed by the completely tiring and very difficult task of throwing out his gloomy and wonderful vision, of a man who writes not what he wants, but what he must, a writer who is a writer precisely because he is himself, refined, subtle, revealing, operating on the border of what is expressible, all striving towards his difficult calling”<sup>39</sup>.

### February–October 1936: “Party with Witold”, or three letters in “Studio”

On February 4, 1936, in the evening, Schulz and Gombrowicz met in Warsaw at Zofia Nałkowska’s. The meeting was also attended by the diplomat Władysław Baranowski, the painter Henryk Berlewi and the writer Włodzimierz Pietrzak<sup>40</sup>. They all discussed literary style inspired by Gombrowicz’s “astonishing, witty, polemical”<sup>41</sup> essay “O stylu Zofii Nałkowskiej”. A month later, Schulz wrote to Andrzej Pleśniewicz: “If you see Witold, please send him my warm greetings. Tell him not to be angry that I have not written to him yet”<sup>42</sup>. Nałkowska notes that Schulz and Gombrowicz also visited her on July 15, 1936. Certainly, both of them visited her place in ul. Marszałkowska 4 quite often. Nałkowska included both Gombrowicz, as well as Schulz in her “regular company” composed of writers and poets: Adolf Rudnicki, Alfred Łaszowski, Tadeusz Breza, Włodzimierz Pietrzak, Bolesław Miciński, Elżbieta Szemplińska<sup>43</sup>. Years later, Gombrowicz even wondered whether it was at Zofia Nałkowska’s place that he met Bruno Schulz<sup>44</sup>.

In Nałkowska’s society, Schulz and Gombrowicz also met with Bogusław Kuczyński, her secretary and then partner. Kuczyński, who had been jealous of Schulz (in July 1935, he destroyed a copy of *The Street of Crocodiles* with

**39** W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 192.

**40** Writer, poet, literary critic. He wrote an article about the correspondence between Schulz and Gombrowicz, which was published in “Studio” (see *Święte szukanie*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki” 1936, no. 9) and a negative review of *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* (see *Bluszcz na ruinach*, “Prostoż Mostu” 1938, no. 27). He died fighting in the Warsaw Uprising. In 1948, his essay *Mit bohaterą* [The Myth of the Hero] was published posthumously, in which he wrote about *Ferdynand* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* that they were works that lead nowhere, were falsified, and pursued strangeness. They were by no means immoral, but “just very boring. Boredom begins with the question: ‘so what?’ and ends with a yawn” (“Nowiny Literackie” 1948, no. 12).

**41** Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV: 1930–1939. Część 2 (1935–1939)*, oprac., wstęp i komentarz H. Kirchner, Warszawa 1988, p. 97.

**42** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 39, p. 83.

**43** Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Część 2 (1935–1939)*, p. 138.

**44** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

a dedication for Nałkowska)<sup>45</sup> – invited him and Gombrowicz to publish texts in the monthly literary journal “Studio”, of which he was the editor. The most spectacular effect of this cooperation was the exchange of letters between the writers, which were published in October 1936<sup>46</sup>. It is generally believed that Bogusław Kuczyński was the originator and initiator of such open correspondence in the magazine, but it seems more likely that it was Gombrowicz’s idea<sup>47</sup>: “Bogusław wants us to write for him in *Studio* – isn’t it better to write for ourselves in *Studio*? – and it’s probably best to write to each other? – yes, to write to each other is more pleasant, how much more pleasant to shoot, aiming at a specific person, than to shoot into space with a general circular addressed to everyone and therefore to no one”<sup>48</sup>.

### “So I shoot at you with the thought of this woman”

Gombrowicz, an experienced debunker of forms and conventions, “shot” at Schulz with the opinion of one doctor’s wife from Wilcza<sup>49</sup>: “Bruno Schulz, she said, is either a sick pervert or a poseur; but most likely a poseur. He’s just pretending to be so”<sup>50</sup>. All this to check whether “Schulz, surprised on the same road by a ridiculous accident with a woman, would manage to maintain good, sovereign form or would disgrace himself”<sup>51</sup>. Why was Schulz the addressee of the letter and the target of Gombrowicz’s provocation? It is not without significance that both addressed the issue of form in their works, but social considerations may have been decisive. Gombrowicz was simply sure that Schulz would answer his letter. In 1936, Schulz was better established on the literary scene than Gombrowicz (“his literary situation was, after all, much more solid than mine. He hadn’t reached a wider audience, but the elite knew and respected him”<sup>52</sup>.

**45** “He tore up the book, but he also burned it so that there would be nothing left, so that it could not be collected or glued together” – Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Part 2 (1935–1939)*, p. 16.

**46** “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7. Reprint of all three letters: W. Gombrowicz, *Polemiki i dyskusje. Varia 2*, Kraków 2004; Schulz’s letter was reprinted in *The Book of Letters* without Gombrowicz’s letters, even though these three letters constitute an integral whole, and can be read only in their own context and should thus be interpreted in relation to each other. They have even been called an “epistolary triptych”.

**47** Gombrowicz wrote about the exchange of letters as an “experiment” he provoked – see W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, listopad 1936, no. 8.

**48** Idem, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 209.

**49** For possible prototypes of the doctor’s wife from ul. Wilcza, see M. Wójcik, *Komentarze i przypisy*, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 7: *Szkice krytyczne*, koncepcja edytorska W. Bolecki, komentarze i przypisy M. Wójcik, oprac. językowe P. Sitkiewicz, Gdańsk 2017, p. 220–221.

**50** W. Gombrowicz, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, p. 209.

**51** Ibidem, p. 210–211.

**52** Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 90.

Moreover, both Gombrowicz and Schulz were victims of similar public attacks, perhaps not by doctors' wives, but by literary critics who simplified everything. In a text published on November 5, 1935, Gombrowicz described the situation of Schulz, whom Ignacy Fik called a "choromaniac" [a reference to Michał Choromański]: "Naturally, Schulz cannot answer Fik, because how could he possibly reply with his rich, branched, complex and well-differentiated thought to the lean categorical nature of Mr. Fik. Nevertheless, in his writing, Mr. Fik picks on Schulz, and Bruno already thinks that he will have to move on with his life as a 'choromaniac'"<sup>53</sup>.

Almost a year after the publication of the polemic with Ignacy Fik, Gombrowicz himself staged a very similar conflict, with the difference that this time he stood not at Schulz's side, but against him. He did not claim that "Schulz cannot answer", but he demanded a reply. Gombrowicz's "attack" was aimed at Schulz's elitism, artistry and high, developed style – which, according to Gombrowicz, was incomprehensible and useless outside the literary-critical circle: "Your philosophical artistic, poetic style does not predispose you to fights with the mothers of the doctors' children". Your form takes place on high. Come on! Come down to earth! [...] What would your form be worth if it was only applicable at an altitude of two thousand meters above the level of life?"<sup>54</sup>.

### **"I hate the doctor's wife from Wilcza"**

Schulz did not take up this game, at least not on Gombrowicz's terms. "He cowardly fled from my doctor, masking his retreat with grandiloquence" – Gombrowicz commented<sup>55</sup>. Andrzej Pleśniewicz, in turn, believes that Schulz did not escape, but "in a playfully pathetic form expressed his credo as an artist", which was the only proper reaction to Gombrowicz's attack<sup>56</sup>. Schulz certainly did not allow himself to be thrown out of his own form. He responded in his poetic, metaphorical style, comparing the arranged public exchange of letters to a corrida, in which Gombrowicz is a bullfighter, Schulz is a bull, readers are the audience, and the doctor's wife from Wilcza is only a cape (cloth) or an effigy stuffed with rags with blades hidden behind them and engravings. Schulz ridiculed this rhetoric, emphasizing his disregard for the rules in arenas and audience expectations. He claimed that instead of listening to screams and trivial opinions, he preferred to take the bullfighter out of the arena to engage in a quiet

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<sup>53</sup> Idem, "O myślach chudych", p. 192.

<sup>54</sup> Idem, *List otwarty do Brunona Schulza*, p. 211.

<sup>55</sup> Idem, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 275.

<sup>56</sup> A. Pleśniewicz, "Rozwichrzona problematyka dyskusji literackiej. Spór o doktorową", in: W. Gombrowicz, *Polemiki i dyskusje*, p. 54.

conversation with him – but this conciliatory tone was only an appearance. Immediately after this declaration, Schulz countered the attack: “No, what a paradox! You, the defender of forums and their loud acoustics!”<sup>57</sup>. This is an accurate retort. Gombrowicz was known for hating platitudes and stereotypes; he provoked his interlocutors to prevent ordinary discussions and conventional conversations about the weather, and when someone unwisely expressed some trivial opinion, Gombrowicz immediately ridiculed them<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, he himself defended Schulz against the primitive claims of Ignacy Fik<sup>59</sup>, who, like the doctor’s wife from Wilcza, accused Schulz of deviations and aberrations (“Choromania! Literature that is twisted and sick”, “created by psychopaths, degenerates, and drug addicts” and other perverts and lunatics<sup>60</sup>). Schulz expressed his surprise by asking further questions – as if in disbelief towards Gombrowicz’s affirmation for “lean thoughts”<sup>61</sup> – his applause for popular and average opinions<sup>62</sup>. Schulz opposed this fascination with contempt for “philistine obtuseness” and “formulaic thinking”. He wrote directly: “I hate the doctor’s wife from Wilcza”, perhaps also because her opinion was in line with national-radical literary criticism and anti-Semitic sentiments<sup>63</sup> of the second half of the 1930s. But the doctor’s wife’s voice – concluded Schulz – arose in Gombrowicz himself, the crowd hidden in the individual that may seem like a powerful force, but it is actually a weakness of human nature. This also includes Gombrowicz’s nature, which can surrender to the rhythm of what is popular and mass, just as a trained bear surrenders to the sounds of the “gypsy pipe”<sup>64</sup>.

The phenomenon of a stupid joke with devastating power – which can defeat an opponent regardless of arguments and reasons – is, according to Schulz, proof that there is a “cynical and amoral, irrational and mocking” underground system of values, symbolized by the doctor’s wife from Wilcza. Schulz considered Gombrowicz to be the discoverer of this unwritten and mysterious code:

57 B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 213.

58 Stefan Otwinowski, among others, was exposed to such ridicule: “Oh, I see, Mr. Stefczyk, that you have read the Sunday supplement ‘IKACA’ again – he interrupted Otwinowski with a smile when he expressed an opinion that – in Gombrowicz’s view – was stereotypical, good only for the readers of the popular mass ‘Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny’” – see J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 210.

59 W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”.

60 I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1.

61 Gombrowicz called the revelations of literary critics directed towards the so-called young literature “lean thoughts”: “In this extreme example, we see how badly lean thought works – how much it is out of place” – W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, s. 192–193.

62 Jerzy Jarzębski calls Gombrowicz’s mania “a fascination with inferiority and interpersonal clashes in that sphere” – see J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 58.

63 “Gombrowicz probably did not take into account that the tone of his voice, the tone of self-important gossip, could have reminded Schulz of the tone with which anti-Semitic slogans were shouted at that time” – see J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 59.

64 B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, p. 213.

“I consider it a great merit that you, for the first time, led our thoughts and feelings to these matters. If I’m not mistaken, you were the first to sniff out the dragon in its thousand hiding places and get within arm’s length of it”<sup>65</sup>. Schulz therefore changes the corrida space arranged by Gombrowicz (in which the bullfighter sneakily kills the bull to the delight of the crowd) into a heroic fight between a knight and a dragon. The knight is Gombrowicz himself, “armed with powerful tools of murder”, and the dragon is an irrational system of values, which is to be killed and sacrificed on the altar of higher values, such as art and humanity. Even though Schulz expressed his concern about such alliances with the dragon, he still – perversely and somewhat ironically – considered his adversary to be a great humanist who would tame the inhuman. Gombrowicz himself would later write about this passage: “in the second part of his reply, he made a playfully pathetic appeal that put me in an extremely difficult position”<sup>66</sup>.

### “Bruno, you’re an old kid, like all of us!”

In response, Gombrowicz attacked with a whole arsenal of childish artifacts, which he contrasted with the high values supported by Schulz. These include a specific lexicon: twats, panties, shins, legs and a full catalogue of issues related to calves. Gombrowicz withdrew imperceptibly from the strategy adopted in the first letter, in which the blade of arguments was the laughter from the crowd – which Schulz pointed out to him. Talking about his aunts, he wrote: “I apologize to you, Saint Bruno, for the thoughts of these women, incurably sceptical about their own nephews”<sup>67</sup>, and immediately afterwards he added: “I would like to confront Goethe himself with his aunt, the calf – I would like to use the calf to destroy the writerly faces of you all!”<sup>68</sup>. In Gombrowicz’s second letter, there is no more mocking noise of the crowd and its merciless shouts. The doctor’s wife from Wilcza created by Gombrowicz does not flaunt her malicious opinions anymore but is intended to bite Schulz at his calves – to knock him off the pedestal, throw him off the ivory tower and put him on the ground among ordinary people, that is, all the hobbledehoys. First, we are girls with calves, nephews in underpants that are too short, and only then are we writers and artists – Gombrowicz seemed to be saying to Schulz, and at the same time to all writers

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<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 215–216.

<sup>66</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 275.

<sup>67</sup> Idem, *Do Brunona Schulza*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, październik 1936, no. 7, p. 218.

<sup>68</sup> There is a certain paradox in Gombrowicz’s intention. Under the very form of open letters of the two writers, there is a mask, a clear form of two great authors arguing with each other at the heights of the literary Parnassus (despite the seeming insignificance of calves and doctors’ wives). This was noticed, among others, by Jan Emil Skiński, who was hostile to Gombrowicz and Schulz – see J. E. Skiński, *Łańcuch szczęścia*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 42, p. 794.

of that time, hidden deep in their reliance on the image of themselves as “bards”. Relationships between body and spirit, throwing off masks, enslavement to form, childishness – for Gombrowicz, the exchange of letters became another kind of practice for *Ferdydurke*, in which everything turns out to have a child within<sup>69</sup>.

### October–December 1936: “Grumbling for the record” – the reaction of the press to the letters in “Studio”

The letters of Gombrowicz and Schulz published in “Studio” were noticed by many critics and commentators of literary life<sup>70</sup>. On October 18, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” published an article by Jan Emil Skiwski “Łańcuch szczęścia”, devoted to snobbery<sup>71</sup>, literary anaemia, self-love and the pretentiousness of the authors. In response, Schulz sent a letter to the editor of “Tygodnik”, Waclaw Czarski, titled “Zamiast odpowiedzi”<sup>72</sup> [Instead of an answer]. In it, he expressed his reluctance to debate such a primitively presented argument and criticism directed at him: “I do not think I am as naive and limited as Mr. Skiwski claims. I also do not suppose I am a snob, hungry for cheap and trivial successes, and I also believe that my literary activity to date does not justify such a presentation”<sup>73</sup>.

In November, Gombrowicz also spoke out and decided that he had to explain the meaning of the “experiment” he had provoked<sup>74</sup>, and at the same time enter a polemic with Skiwski. The purpose of the open exchange of letters, according to Gombrowicz, was to check whether his “friend” Bruno Schulz had the command of language in every respect, even in tactless situations, when life throws a person out of their most comfortable form. “I decided to have fun with

**69** Jerzy Jarzębski writes that in the final version of the novel we will find “sentences as if taken from open letters addressed to Bruno Schulz in ‘Studio’” – see J. Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, Warszawa 1982, p. 215.

**70** See A. Pleśniewicz, *Spór o doktorowką. Rozwichrzona problematyka dyskusji literackiej*, “Kurier Poranny” 1936, no. 329; J. E. Skiwski, *Łańcuch szczęścia*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 42; W. Pietrzak, *Święte szukanie*, “Studio” 1936, no. 9; W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, “Studio” 1936, no. 8.

**71** Critics associated with the national movement were obsessed with “literary snobbery”, which can be seen, for example, in the articles of Stanisław Piasecki, editor-in-chief of the weekly “Prosto z Mostu”. Gombrowicz knew that it was difficult to escape from this form, which is why he often used snobbery: “It was some kind of mania for snobbery, or some game of snobbery [...]. For, after all, we were all snobs, even though, to be honest, we were not. Oh, form!” – see W. Gombrowicz, *Testament. Rozmowy z Dominique de Roux*, Kraków 2012, p. 14–15.

**72** The letter was published on November 1, 1936 on the last pages of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” next to advertisements for a mild laxative, toothpaste and powder – see B. Schulz, *Zamiast odpowiedzi*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1936, no. 44, p. 848.

**73** See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Waclawa Czarskiego, no. I 58, p. 99–100.

**74** W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*.

Bruno – I wrote an open letter to him that was deliberately tactless”<sup>75</sup>. According to Gombrowicz, Schulz (“a noble, pure and impractical poet”) failed and, in fact, fled in a cowardly manner from confrontation with the grey, ordinary life that had materialised in front of him in the form of the doctor’s wife from Wilcza. Running away, though, he set a trap for Gombrowicz, who indeed fell into it. “My answer, which was supposed to be light, humorous, and belittling, turned out to be heavy and insufficient in the context of Schulz’s letter [...]. Does this mean that Schulz and I are snobs?”<sup>76</sup>.

With this question, Gombrowicz referred to Skiwski’s text, and then step by step ridiculed the thesis of his article, such as the order to remain silent about himself, a ban on writing about his ordinary problems, on making public only the complete and perfect works carved in solitude, reserving certain topics exclusively for outstanding writers such as Gide and Mauriac. Gombrowicz did not shy away from malice: “It is not strange that such an opinion comes from the mouth of a man who does nothing else but – in short and necessarily superficial articles – raises issues that, to put it in his terminology, he is not mature enough to handle, and he judges people who are way above him”. To the accusation of pretending to be someone he was not, Gombrowicz replied: “An element of a perfectly conscious mystification is common to both of us, and is most clearly visible in Schulz’s works, and everything I have written so far has been a mystification and parody only”<sup>77</sup>. Towards the end, Gombrowicz paraphrases Skiwski’s words by writing about the “error of our criticism” that develops at someone else’s expense.

On November 26, 1936, in “Kurier Poranny”, Andrzej Pleśniewicz commented on the exchange of letters in “Studio”, firmly siding with Schulz. Pleśniewicz drew attention to “the confusion of conceptual territories” in Gombrowicz’s reasoning regarding art and life. As a result, he considered it unjustified to demand that a writer should be able to behave or express himself appropriately in every life situation. It is as if – Pleśniewicz compared – as if an excellent fencer was obliged to master the cudgel<sup>78</sup>.

Three days after this publication in “Kurier Poranny”, in a letter dated November 29, 1936, Schulz thanked Pleśniewicz for his support in the confrontation with Gombrowicz, “for such a beautiful and profound defence”. He expressed surprise that his “party with Witold” was taken so seriously because he had previously considered it “trivial and playful”, and only after some time, in the course of subsequent discussions, it began to take on new meanings “illuminating

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<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p. 274.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, p. 275.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, p. 279.

<sup>78</sup> A. Pleśniewicz, *Rozwiczrzone problematy dyskusji literackiej*, p. 54–55.

those epiphenomena that followed”<sup>79</sup>. The same day, and in a similar tone, he wrote back to Romana Halpern, who had referred to the exchange of letters in “Studio”: “I did not write about the correspondence with Gombre, because in fact it was a trivial matter – it is not known why it was discussed so much”<sup>80</sup>. Two days later, on December 1, Schulz wrote to Pleśniewicz again, probably in response to his question about the article from “Kurier Poranny”<sup>81</sup>. Schulz admitted that his opinion about the provocation in “Studio” was similar – that “the real personal benefit of mastering the phrase ‘it cannot be’ is a test of artistry” and “the groundlessness of the demand that a writer be what Gombre calls a ‘full writer’”<sup>82</sup>. He noted, however, that the opponent’s position was very strong, it was not easy to argue with him, and Gombrowicz could effectively attack Pleśniewicz in this field.

In December of the same year, in the 9th issue of “Studio”, Włodzimierz Pietrzak, an acquaintance of Schulz and Gombrowicz, who often visited Zofia Nałkowska’s apartment, also expressed his view. In his text, Pietrzak defended Schulz against the charge of insanity<sup>83</sup>, saying that a non-mimetic type of creativity (called “sacred seeking”) is necessary for the further development of culture. “It is worth putting the name of such madness as a laurel on a burnt forehead”<sup>84</sup>. Pietrzak pointed out that the case of the doctor’s wife from Wilcza is a symbol of the cultural situation at the time. All art and critical ways of thinking have become, in his opinion, incomprehensible to society, and intellectual achievements are no longer useful to the crowd – that is why the crowd calls them anomalies. The author of the text therefore asked what we could do to reverse this situation: “How to educate society so that searching and discovering are not synonymous with madness?”<sup>85</sup>.

### January–October 1937: The manuscript of *Ferdydurke* – “I don’t think it needs to be published”

Gombrowicz and Schulz continued the dialogue on form outside the pages of “Studio” – unofficially and on a “confidential basis”<sup>86</sup>. They must have



<sup>79</sup> See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, list do Andrzeja Pleśniewicza, no. I 69, p. 121–122.

<sup>80</sup> See *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

<sup>81</sup> The letter in which Pleśniewicz asks Schulz about his article has not survived.

<sup>82</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Andrzej Pleśniewicz, no. I 70, p. 123.

<sup>83</sup> A year and a half later, though, Pietrzak would criticize *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* for preferring sick solitude over such values as fight and honour, see *Bluszcz na ruinach*, “Prosto z Mostu” 1938, no. 27, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> W. Pietrzak, *Święte szukanie*, “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki” 1936, no. 9, p. 315.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>86</sup> Schulz would later describe their relationship with this word, see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, p. 158.



corresponded for some time and soon met in person. In January 1937, Gombrowicz visited Schulz, who was suffering from influenza in Warsaw<sup>87</sup> and had not left his bed for ten days<sup>88</sup>. During the visit, Gombrowicz showed him the unfinished manuscript of *Ferdydurke*. Schulz was the first person to read the novel in this form<sup>89</sup>. In a letter to Tadeusz Breza, Schulz described this version as “wonderful”<sup>90</sup>, but it was by no means an honest statement. Schulz did not really like the first fragments of the novel<sup>91</sup>. In May 1936, he wrote to Tadeusz Breza: “Gombrowicz’s fragment did not seem vivid enough to me”<sup>92</sup>. But Schulz did not mean the fragment printed in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, contrary to what we could read in the footnotes to this letter<sup>93</sup>. On July 14, 1935, in the 28th issue of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, Gombrowicz’s short story that would become part of the already-announced novel was published with the title “Tośka. Fragmenty”<sup>94</sup>. Why would Tadeusz Breza write to Schulz about this old publication almost a year later, and where would Schulz get an old issue of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”? Breza was certainly referring to the second issue of “Studio” published in May 1936<sup>95</sup>, whose editor was their friend Bogusław Kuczyński, secretary and partner of Zofia Nałkowska<sup>96</sup>. In this issue, Breza found a story by Schulz titled “O sobie” [About Myself]<sup>97</sup> and Gombrowicz’s short story “Skazić urok nowoczesnej pensjonarki! (Z powieści *Ferdydurke*)” [Contaminate the Charm of a Modern Schoolgirl! (From the novel *Ferdydurke*)] – about which he wrote in a letter that

**87** Schulz may not have had the flu, but he had a hard time coping with the suicide attempt of Józefina Szelińska of the second half of January 1937.

**88** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 20.

**89** “Bruno was first. I had confidence in him” – see W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

**90** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 20, p. 59.

**91** These were texts that Gombrowicz delivered to Schulz personally in draft form, or fragments of *Ferdydurke* printed in literary magazines. There were as many as ten publications preceding the book edition of the novel in nine different magazines, including “Skamander”, “Wiadomości Literackie” and “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” – see “Jak powstawała *Ferdydurke*”, in: W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, oprac. W. Bolecki, Kraków 2007, p. 261.

**92** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

**93** See *ibidem*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, footnote no. 26, p. 347.

**94** See W. Gombrowicz, *Tośka. (Fragmenty)*, p. 556–557.

**95** “Studio. Miesięcznik literacki”, maj 1936, no. 2. On May 10, 1936, Zofia Nałkowska wrote: “The second issue of ‘Studio’ is more beautiful, it is thicker, it has a cover, it has my article, and Schulz, Gombrowicz, Choromański, as well as my reviews of books and theatres” – see Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki IV. Część 2*, p. 109–110.

**96** Breza probably announced to Schulz that the next issue of “Studio” would contain an excerpt from his novel *Adam Grywałd*, to which Schulz replied: “I am looking forward to the excerpt” – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

**97** The story would later be reprinted in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* with the title “Samotność” [published in English translations as “Solitude” and “Loneliness”]. Breza praised this and probably other works, and Schulz replied: “The fragments of mine that you read – they were written by hand – once, I found them now as ‘paralipomena’. Your praise is not justified” – B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. I 17, p. 57.

it was more vivid than “Dziewictwo” [Virginité] from *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*. Schulz admitted that Breza was right but noted that it was probably only “the effect of [his] greater courage and awareness of [his] own intentions”<sup>98</sup>. Schulz was not particularly impressed by the unfinished *Ferdydurke*, which he often admitted in conversations with Gombrowicz. Perhaps he did not want to criticize his friend’s book, which is why, in his letter of February 2, 1937 to Tadeusz Breza – who was an ardent enthusiast of Gombrowicz’s work<sup>99</sup> – he only wrote briefly: “It’s almost ready and wonderful”<sup>100</sup>, without going into polemical debates or details.

Gombrowicz quoted Schulz’s true opinion about the manuscript years later: “You should rather go back to your fantasy from *Pamiętnik*, that genre suits you better”<sup>101</sup>, and also: “I don’t think this needs to be published”<sup>102</sup>.

Schulz’s cold reaction gave Gombrowicz food for thought: “I felt a wave of cold. No one else read this piece that I put so much work into. Bruno was first. I had confidence in him”<sup>103</sup>. He devoted the following months to revising the novel, which was published in its entirety at the end of October 1937, together with Schulz’s illustrations. Almost nothing is known about the circumstances in which the three drawings accompanying Gombrowicz’s novel were created. Two of them were placed towards the end of the chapter “Parobek, czyli nowe przychwycenie” [The Farmhand, or a New Adoption]. The third drawing, depicting “a twisted, rheumatized oak tree with boughs and branches growing in the form of human heads, gesticulating hands and arms and bucking legs”<sup>104</sup>, was featured on the dust jacket designed by Schulz. Gombrowicz referred to this drawing in the dedication written on October 20 in a copy of *Ferdydurke*, which he was to send to Schulz: “Dear Bruno, I am planting a seed for the growth of these frail body parts in the fertile and wonderful soil of yours. 20.10.1937 W.G.”<sup>105</sup>.

### November 1937: “When he’d read *Ferdydurke*, he burst into flames”

Schulz picked up a copy of *Ferdydurke* in the first half of November – and only this version made him truly delighted<sup>106</sup>. The novel made a “thrilling” and



<sup>98</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>99</sup> See W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 79.

<sup>100</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Tadeusz Breza, no. 1 20, p. 59.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted after: W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

<sup>102</sup> Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>104</sup> J. Ficowski, *Komentarze i glosy*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga obrazów*, zebrał, oprac., komentarzami opatrzył J. Ficowski, p. 519.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted after: J. Ficowski, *Komentarze i glosy*, p. 519; Józefina Szeleńska found a copy of *Ferdydurke* with a dedication by Gombrowicz in 1967.

<sup>106</sup> See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. 1 9.

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ

# FERDYDURKE



R O J

Witold Gombrowicz, **Ferdydurke**, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój", Warszawa 1937. Cover by Bruno Schulz

“stunning” impression on him<sup>107</sup>. “When he read *Ferdydurke* in the book form, he burst into flames that almost burned me, somebody who was rather cold”<sup>108</sup> – Gombrowicz recollected. Schulz even telegraphed him several times in one day to express his growing admiration<sup>109</sup>. According to Schulz, it was an innovative and revelatory novel, defying any literary classification. He compared the author’s spiritual endeavour to the achievements of Sigmund Freud and Marcel Proust, and called Gombrowicz a genius<sup>110</sup>. Schulz confessed in one of his letters that he was in a sense “charged” by Gombrowicz’s novel, which gave him no peace<sup>111</sup>. At the same time, he admitted that he had not expected Gombrowicz to write such a masterpiece: “It is a strange feeling when you interact with someone on such a familiar basis, and suddenly a genius bursts out of them. Gombrowicz is just brilliant”<sup>112</sup>. To give an outlet to his emotions, he decided to write a text about *Ferdydurke*, which he did over the next few weeks.

### 1936–1938: *Ferdydurke* and Romana Halpern

In the context of Schulz’s text about *Ferdydurke*, the figure of Romana Halpern is important. At the end of November 1936, Schulz recommended her to read *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania*, which he considered a “sensational book”<sup>113</sup>. A few months later, Romana Halpern asked Schulz to arrange a meeting with the author of *Pamiętnik*. Schulz promised to write to him about this matter: “As for Gombrowicz, I will try to initiate the acquaintance between you, because it is worth getting to know him. Can I just write to him that you would like to meet?”<sup>114</sup>. However, he started writing the letter only a month later, on September 29, 1937. That day he informed Romana Halpern: “At the same time, I am writing to Gombrowicz about you. I hope that I will be able to arrange some rapprochement between you. But he is unhealthy and not in the best shape now”<sup>115</sup>. Schulz’s fears were confirmed, as he informed his friend: “I am unlucky with Gombrowicz. He is going through some depression now and is avoiding people. He promised me that when he feels better, he will call you”<sup>116</sup>.

**107** Ibidem, no. I 93, p. 158.

**108** W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

**109** Idem, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 127; idem, *Kronos*, Kraków 2013, p. 37 and 43.

**110** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, s. 158.

**111** Ibidem.

**112** Ibidem.

**113** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 83, p. 143.

**114** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 90, p. 153–154.

**115** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 91, p. 156.

**116** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 92, p. 157.

Gombrowicz's bad mood was related to the upcoming publication of *Ferdydurke*, but it did not go away with it: "Broken, sad, exhausted, I spent a few months in the Tatra Mountains, then I left for Rome. Giving birth to a book is never pleasant, but this birth was the worst of all my births"<sup>117</sup>. Gombrowicz also recalls that he was simply afraid of attacks by the nationalist press, which could result in him being beaten by some "fascist gang"<sup>118</sup>. In the next letter, dated November 16, 1937, Schulz informed Romana Halpern about the "electrifying" impression that reading *Ferdydurke* made on him. Despite Schulz's praise, the author of the novel remained "depressed and concerned about the fate of his book"<sup>119</sup>, he also promised to send Halpern a copy of it – which means that he was in constant contact with Schulz through correspondence. In the same letter, Schulz confided that he wanted to write a text about *Ferdydurke*. Romana Halpern, also delighted with Gombrowicz's novel, suggested to Schulz that he should publicly present his newly written article – and offered to help. She was a member of artistic and literary circles and was sometimes involved in readings and cultural events. Gombrowicz, who had read the text of the speech prepared by Schulz<sup>120</sup>, enthusiastically responded to this initiative. He was grateful to Schulz and Romana Halpern for their engagement. Two days before the planned lecture, he wrote a card from Zakopane to Bruno Schulz: "I am touched by your activity and grateful to Mrs. Halpern for this idea"<sup>121</sup>.

### January 1938: A reading that "infuriated all the mandarins of the time"

On January 11, 1938, Schulz read his article during a discussion evening at the Polish Literary Trade Union in Warsaw at ul. Pierackiego 16<sup>122</sup>. Schulz's paper provoked a heated discussion, with Wanda Kragen, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Stefan Napierski and Rafał Blüth expressing their opinions. Schulz himself was not satisfied with his speech: "I left that evening a bit depressed by the excellent

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**117** W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 43.

**118** Ibidem.

**119** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, s. 158.

**120** We know this from Gombrowicz's letter to Schulz of July 19, 1938, in which Gombrowicz mentioned that he had read Schulz's article right after the publication of *Ferdydurke* – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 281.

**121** Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 9, p. 278.

**122** Press reports regarding Schulz's lecture only mention the ZLP premises. Anyway, it is known that since 1936 the Association's premises were located at ul. Pierackiego 16a – see "Studio", *grudzień 1936*, no. 9, p. 350. For several years, Tuesday literary readings were regularly organized there: "For several years now, the Warsaw branch of the Polish Literary Trade Union organises at ul. Pierackiego 16a apartment 8 regular Tuesday discussions with eminent local and visiting speakers" – see *Odczyty w Związku Literatów*, "Wiadomości Literackie", 19 marca 1939, no. 12 (804), p. 8.

Drogi Brunie,

Wzrost o przeżyciu się. To jest, samoprzeżycie opadł mi pociąg  
Karaici z serca. Był to grzywniemięty towar. Niezno jak to  
o rękach z ustawicem znowy góły prośbied frizkaleg tych  
objawów u siebie uosob dawałemu jak uioztyelony. Jest: stoa  
o dobrej sytuacji, góły odwalitś zę pociąg i uan taaawc ceo dobro.  
Poruczasz zaleci si do woloty - do jeliciki gac zapeteni uogod,  
Którzy odlewały ciś od gawdosci i skiamaty, o gawdosci.

Ja dohri uosowam się lepiej i gawdosci, sig. Poproba tutaj  
ladua. Ze uogonych a: kupa opowia p. Wodankij e ktos  
apto si widaję. Nic mi robiz.

Niestety z artykułem Tonia stalo si to, co przewidywalem. Choc  
kemu w pism, uosawa to ze powonij uis dla Indyglerki:  
Pop si i Tyrolsk wiazet top mi zamisic - gawdosci bly  
wajst saen ze try strony! Prostop jenne lypuety, ab Sko-  
uawder awet knidunij lyply lypny, bo powonijne gawdos.  
Zabze uis si, ze uistudues lypoty zewicaw: uiektore awoty,  
uodajice teenu artykulowi Charakter aktualny. Nabyt  
optyuetyrenis ocaarin sytuacjs, Indyglerka i uogjs.

Z Sandcaurem frontop u krajmelburgi i awis si ude  
prowerowaci go do bamony

Witold Gombrowicz

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Letter from Witold Gombrowicz to Bruno Schulz  
from the beginning of January 1938, Museum of  
Literature in Warsaw

speeches of other people and with disgust at my own reading”<sup>123</sup>. He had left the premises before the discussion ended because he felt overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to talk to him and offer contrary views<sup>124</sup>. The discussion that started with the reading about *Ferdydurke* moved to the pages of magazines, where numerous reports and extreme comments appeared. Gombrowicz was grateful to Schulz, who not only gave his novel the highest praise, but also provoked another wave of discussions about *Ferdydurke* – regardless of the fact that he exposed himself to numerous attacks from critics, and the reading enraged “all the mandarins of the time”<sup>125</sup>. And not only during the discussion that took place at the office of the trade union. A statement of Stanisław Piasecki is a case in point: at the end of January, he called Schulz’s enthusiasm towards *Ferdydurke* a symptom of psychosis<sup>126</sup>. On January 18, Schulz informed Romana Halpern: “Gombrowicz writes to me that we did him a huge favour, that the effect was perfect, as he is informed from everywhere, and he says he is obliged to us”. “One way or another, it is of great importance for the book, it stimulates, creates a sensation, emboldens those who are of a similar opinion and creates a movement” – these are Gombrowicz’s words<sup>127</sup>. The sensation and movement that Gombrowicz wrote about were also manifested in announcements, comments and reports from Schulz’s speech, which appeared in the press on those days<sup>128</sup>.

Even years later, Gombrowicz will write about Schulz’s paper on *Ferdydurke* as an almost heroic act; he expressed such a view in private letters<sup>129</sup>, in *Dziennik* and in *Wspomnienia polskie*: “Who was the first to dare to throw all his enthusiasm into the scale of the growing discussion about *Ferdydurke*, if not my grand late friend, Bruno Schulz?”<sup>130</sup>. The same thought comes back every now and then: Schulz was the first person to understand and support him, regardless of the costs.

Schulz continued the discussion about Gombrowicz and his work in his private correspondence. Among Schulz’s preserved letters, we find only two

**123** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 94.

**124** “I am not immune to people who impose themselves on me, and a lot of people attacked me” – ibidem, letter no. I 95, p. 160. See also: W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik...*, p. 656.

**125** Ibidem.

**126** S. Piasecki, *Czarowanie gałką w zębach*, „Prosto z Mostu”, 30 stycznia 1938, no. 7 (173). Schulz’s name does not appear in the article, but the context (a lecture at a discussion meeting) is almost entirely clear.

**127** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, s. 160.

**128** See *Odczyt o Gombrowiczu*, „Apel” 1938, no. 17, dodatek artystyczno-literacki „Kuriera Porannego”, no. 16, p. 1; *Odczyt o nowej powieści Gombrowicza*, „Czas” 1938, no. 8, p. 10; *Schulz o Gombrowiczu*, „Nowy Dziennik”, 15 stycznia 1938, no. 15, p. 10; *To nie była dyskusja lecz demonstracja*, „Czas”, 19 stycznia 1938, no. 18, p. 6; *Tydzień kulturalny. W kraju*, „Tygodnik ilustrowany”, 23 stycznia 1938, no. 4, p. 81.

**129** See letter to Józef Wittlin from April 1961 (*Walka o sławę*, cz. 1), to Artur Sandauer of June 19, 1961 (*Walka o sławę*, cz. 1), to Jerzy Gombrowicz of July 3, 1961 (*Listy do rodziny*).

**130** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 91.

addressees to whom he wrote about *Ferdydurke*: Zenon Waśniewski (“Make sure to read *Ferdydurke* – a brilliant work!”<sup>131</sup>) and Romana Halpern (“revealing and sensational”<sup>132</sup>). However, we can find traces of many similar conversations in letters from Wanda Kragen, Maria Flukowska, Artur Sandauer, Witkacy and Izydor Berman. These people were most likely to respond to mentions of Gombrowicz’s work, which were formulated by Schulz in the lost letters.

We only have a small part of his correspondence, but based on it we can assume that he informed many, if not all, of his correspondents about *Ferdydurke*.

### January–February 1938: Gombrowicz’s pessimism

Despite Schulz’s efforts, Gombrowicz was still pessimistic about the future of his novel. “You are too optimistic about the situation of *Ferdydurke* and myself”<sup>133</sup> – he shrugged off his friend’s enthusiasm. He was also concerned about the rejection of Schulz’s text by “Wiadomości Literackie”: “Contrary to what you write, I consider it a serious blow to *Ferdydurke*”<sup>134</sup>. Gombrowicz, just like after his debut, noticed malicious criticism everywhere. He claimed that he was then the greatest enemy of Stanisław Piasecki from the “Prosto z Mostu” magazine, who, after reading fragments of his novel, “felt stunned, spat and, instead of printing it, declared war on me”<sup>135</sup>. Schulz himself did not share Gombrowicz’s concerns and discredited the attacks against him. About Piasecki’s text<sup>136</sup>, which expressed sharp criticism of the author of *Ferdydurke*, he wrote the following: “He is vulgar and stupid”<sup>137</sup>.

### January–February 1938: Stanisław Brochwicz – Gombrowicz’s acquaintance

Shortly after the lecture, Schulz made contact with one of Gombrowicz’s friends, Stanisław Brochwicz, who offered him help regarding the translation of *The Street of Crocodiles* into German<sup>138</sup>. Perhaps it was not an empty promise, because as a Nazi agent he certainly had great opportunities. He gave Schulz the contact details of a woman translator from Vienna, whom Schulz, in fact, had known long before. However, Romana Halpern warned Schulz against collaborating

**131** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 48, p. 92.

**132** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 93, p. 158.

**133** Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 10, p. 279.

**134** Ibidem.

**135** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 98.

**136** S. Piasecki, *Czarowanie gałązką w zębach*.

**137** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

**138** Schulz writes about this in a letter to Romana Halpern – see ibidem, letter no. I 94, p. 159.



with a man who did not hide his fascist and anti-Semitic views: “Thank you for your warning about Brochwicz. I am not writing to him. I am waiting for him to write something”<sup>139</sup>. Gombrowicz’s circle believed that Brochwicz only pretends to be an agent (“Poor Brochwicz pretends to be a spy, but he won’t fool us”<sup>140</sup>). Gombrowicz himself later explained that he only realized this during their joint trip to Rome in March 1938<sup>141</sup>, after a series of strange events involving Brochwicz (“I suddenly understood. It was in the Vatican, when I was walking through the halls – yes, he must have been a Nazi agent!”<sup>142</sup>). Earlier, Brochwicz asked Schulz to write a review of his book *Matki czuwają* [Mothers Are Watching]. As you can see, anti-Semitism did not prevent him from courting the renowned Jewish writer. Schulz replied that he had given up writing reviews, but he liked the book – because he did not want to alienate Brochwicz. However, he did not have the best opinion about the collection itself: “I have the impression that it is a graphomaniac book, though apparently Gombrowicz was delighted with it (I don’t know if he is being sincere)”<sup>143</sup>. Indeed, Gombrowicz positively assessed Brochwicz’s book, as evidenced by his review, which appeared on February 26, 1938 in “Kurier Poranny”<sup>144</sup>. Gombrowicz must have shown it to Schulz earlier, because he informed Romana Halpern already in mid-February: “I am very surprised that Gombrowicz wrote such a good review of Brochwicz. I couldn’t read this book, but please don’t tell anyone, because I naturally told him that I liked it”<sup>145</sup>. Probably after Gombrowicz returned from Italy, contact with Brochwicz ceased. In 1941, Brochwicz was sentenced to death by the underground court for collaboration and consequently stabbed to death.

During this time, Schulz and Gombrowicz exchanged letters regularly. In February 1938, Schulz wrote: “I am constantly in contact with Gombrowicz”<sup>146</sup>. They probably talked about Gombrowicz’s departure to Italy, the future of *Ferdynand* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and about chances for these books in the literary contest organised by “Wiadomości Literackie”. At that time, the issue of the award for the best book published in 1937 was being decided. Schulz expected that Gombrowicz would receive the award – though he was hoping to get it himself, too<sup>147</sup>. “I would love to take this award mainly

**139** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, p. 161.

**140** J. Siedlecka, *Jaśnie Panicz*, p. 227.

**141** In *Wspomnienia polskie*, Gombrowicz incorrectly states that he made this trip in April or May. March is indicated by the entries in *Kronos* and Schulz’s letter to Romana Halpern of March 31, 1938, which mentions Gombrowicz’s return to Warsaw.

**142** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 136.

**143** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 97, p. 164.

**144** See W. Gombrowicz, *Książki. Matki i mężczyźni*, “Kurier Poranny”, 26 lutego 1938, no. 57, p. 3.

**145** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 98, p. 165.

**146** See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

**147** See ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 98, p. 164–165.

because it is a bridge to go beyond the Polish language. And money means something too!”<sup>148</sup> – he wrote to Romana Halpern. Ultimately, none of them received the award, which was given to Jeremi Wasiutyński for his monograph *Kopernik. Twórca nowego nieba*.

### March–April 1938: Schulz returns to *Ferdydurke*

At the beginning of March 1938, Gombrowicz went to Italy with Stanisław Brochwicz. At that time, Schulz received no news from him. “Gombrowicz is not in Warsaw. He doesn’t send me anything<sup>149</sup> – he reported in a letter from March 20, 1938. Gombrowicz contacted his friend at the end of the month, when he returned to Poland. On March 31, Schulz noted: “Gombrowicz’s recently come to Warsaw and written to me after a long break”<sup>150</sup>. He might have described to Schulz his thoughts on being an artist, perhaps he reported disturbing political events he experienced while staying in Austria (the invasion by the German Reich), or shared his observations about Brochwicz. Schulz decided to return to the topic of *Ferdydurke*, came to Warsaw and had a “rather fundamental conversation” with Gombrowicz. Schulz could not understand this apathy of the friend he considered a genius. “He bitterly reproached me for not being personally up to par with what I was writing. I was sitting in a chair, mumbling something stupid, and inwardly I agreed with him that he was right. I wasn’t up to par. Me, a specialist at inferiority, I was also below my own work, me, a private person, some rural-urban Gombrowicz... Why couldn’t I celebrate victory?”<sup>151</sup>.

### April 1938: Gombrowicz and Witkiewicz read *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*

At that time, Gombrowicz was reading *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which he rated very highly, and he praised Schulz on an ongoing basis. “Gombrowicz writes me many compliments about my book”, the latter reported<sup>152</sup>. Impressed by the book, Gombrowicz wrote a critical sketch devoted to it.

“Gombrowicz wrote an article about me, which he sent to ‘Kurier Poryanny’<sup>153</sup> – noted Schulz on April 17, 1938 in a letter to Romana Halpern. The finished text was published on April 24, 1938 in a supplement to “Kurier

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<sup>148</sup> *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 102, p. 171.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 103, p. 172.

<sup>151</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 49.

<sup>152</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 104, p. 173.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*.

Poranny” under the title *Twórczość Brunona Schulza*<sup>154</sup>. Romana Halpern wrote to Schulz on May 15 that it was an “excellent article”<sup>155</sup> about his work. In this text, Gombrowicz tried to explain Schulz’s style and philosophy. In his opinion, Schulz wanted to reach the truth by presenting various masks of reality, combining various forms which existence takes on – in order to separate what is fleeting and transitory (form) from what is permanent and unchanging. He emphasized Schulz’s stylistic skill, but wondered to what extent the modern writer was enslaved by his style. At the same time, Gombrowicz defended non-veristic literature, which, in his view, was the only honest literary form: “the very act of describing imaginary events as if they really happened, giving them the appearance of real life when everyone knows that they were born in our heads, is a regrettable fiction and mystification”<sup>156</sup>. Years later, Gombrowicz will remember this review and describe the background of its creation: “I once wrote an article about it for ‘Kurier Poranny’ and then I remembered that I was very afraid that they would say that I was praising him because he praises me... out of this fear, an article was born, not directly about Schulz, but about how his work should be read”<sup>157</sup>.

At the same time, *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass* was also read by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (“some of the pages are wonderful!”), who on April 23, 1938 wrote a letter to Schulz in which he informed him about his separation from Czesława Oknińska-Korzeniowska and his poor mental condition<sup>158</sup>. He explained why he had not been in touch for some time, and perhaps realized that Schulz had become closer to Gombrowicz. That is why he asked Schulz: “Write right away and comfort me, not taking into account that I have not written to you for so long” – and at the same time expressing hope: “I don’t think Gombrowicz will separate us”<sup>159</sup>. In this case, Gombrowicz did not separate them; Schulz fulfilled his friend’s request and wrote a “wonderful letter”. This fact after is confirmed by Witkacy’s reactions, expressed in two letters to his wife (of April 29: “I had a wonderful letter from Schulz”, and April 31: “I got a wonderful letter from Bruno Schulz”<sup>160</sup>).

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**154** W. Gombrowicz, *Twórczość Brunona Schulza*, „Apel”, 24 kwietnia 1938, no. 31, a special literary supplement to “Kurier Poranny”, no. 112, p. 1.

**155** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Romana Halpern, no. III 7, p. 275.

**156** W. Gombrowicz, “Twórczość Brunona Schulza”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 300.

**157** Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 657.

**158** S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy II* (vol. 2, part 2), oprac. i przypisami opatrzyli J. Degler, S. Okołowicz, T. Pawlak, Warszawa 2017, letter to Bruno Schulz of April 23, 1938, p. 274.

**159** Ibidem, letter to Bruno Schulz of April 23, 1938, p. 275.

**160** Idem, *Listy do żony...*, letters no. 1211 and 1212, p. 230–231.

### May–June 1938: Trip to Paris and temptation by Christianity

In May 1938, Gombrowicz helped Schulz organize a trip to Paris. The trip was to be made easier because Schulz was going to sign up to the PEN Club and obtain a journalist's ID. Regarding membership in the PEN Club, Gombrowicz contacted Stella Olgierd (Polish Literary Club, ul. Pierackiego 16) by phone, who was then to send Schulz the necessary forms for candidates. In the matter of journalistic credentials, Gombrowicz advised Schulz to write to the editor Wojciech Natanson from "Czas" (ul. Szpitalna 12) "with a proposal to place travel correspondence there"<sup>161</sup>. Moreover, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz about moving to Warsaw. He also advised him to get closer to Catholicism, which, in his opinion, corresponded to the properties and needs of Schulz's nature: "Your gentleness, mysticism, sublimation, weakness in life, contemplative tendencies (to limit yourself to the most simple things), all these predispose you to this spiritual direction, to Christianity – and I am almost sure that, despite any intellectual (or other) resistance, your nature will accept the atmosphere itself"<sup>162</sup>. According to Jerzy Ficowski, Gombrowicz's persuasions were an "experiment" and "an attempt at a psychological procedure"<sup>163</sup>. However, Gombrowicz's preserved letters show that in his private correspondence with Schulz, he was not a calculating experimenter. He tried to address his friend's questions and problems in a factual manner or talked freely about Sandauer's vices – these were not Gombrowicz's tricks known from the letters published in "Studio". But still, in Gombrowicz's view, approaching Christianity was supposed to be more spiritual than dogmatic. The context of the opening sentences of the letter shows that this proposal seemed to be a practical solution to Schulz<sup>164</sup>. Gombrowicz's was not the first attempt to connect Schulz with Catholic ideology (not necessarily faith). A few months earlier, Maria Flukowska wrote to him: "I believe most deeply that you will 'end up' in Catholicism. I have been convinced of this for a long time. Certain reviews indicate that your attitude and intellectual dispositions are Catholic (these include, in some parts, the second review about Kuncewiczowa, much truer than the first one)"<sup>165</sup>. In this context, which Jerzy Ficowski did not know, one should look differently at Gombrowicz's demands for Schulz to establish closer relations with Christian thought and ideas.

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<sup>161</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 280.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 279–280.

<sup>163</sup> J. Ficowski, *Listy do Brunona Schulza*, in: B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, note no. 9, p. 416.

<sup>164</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 279.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from Maria Flukowska, no. III 41, p. 320.

At the same time, in May 1938, Schulz was deprived of access to the Warsaw press, and therefore feeling the critical literary void growing around his work, he asked a friend to send him his review of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, which was published in “Apel”<sup>166</sup>, a supplement to “Kurier Poranny”<sup>167</sup>. Gombrowicz replied (in a letter sent between May 19 and 28) that he would do so as soon as he visited the editorial office of “Kurier” but was also surprised that Schulz did not have adequate access to the press: “I don’t understand why you don’t have a subscription. I rarely read literary and other magazines, but in reviews about me there are often mentions of you, proving that your situation is much better than mine”<sup>168</sup>.

In the next preserved letter, from June 1938, Gombrowicz confirmed that the matter of journalistic accreditation had already been resolved, and he himself had telephoned editor Natanson about it. He also returned to the matter of PEN Club membership<sup>169</sup> and informed Schulz that he had no contacts at the Foreign Currency Exchange Headquarters that issued foreign means of payment<sup>170</sup>. He also reminded Schulz about his proposal to become spiritually closer to Catholicism, which his corresponded could be achieved by going to Laski<sup>171</sup>: “Wouldn’t it be good if you went to Laski before leaving for Paris?”<sup>172</sup>.

### July 1938: Article about *Ferdydurke* in “Skamander”

In July 1938, Schulz’s article about *Ferdydurke* was published in “Skamander”<sup>173</sup>. It is a very erudite and well-thought-out text, and at the same time a piece of fiction itself, almost a full story filled with extraordinary metaphors and brilliant comparisons. It is *Ferdydurke* read in Schulz’s style: “Wherever we plunge our hand into the flesh of the work, we feel the powerful muscles of thought, the biceps and bones of athletic anatomy, not made up with cotton wool and tow.

**166** See *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 105, p. 175.

**167** “Besides, I don’t know about any reviews because I haven’t subscribed to the press” – see *ibidem*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 97, p. 164.

**168** *Ibidem*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 11, p. 280.

**169** On June 7, 1938, Schulz was already on the PEN Club’s mailing list, so Gombrowicz’s letter to Schulz was probably sent at the beginning of June – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from the Polish branch of the Pen Club, no. III 48, p. 437.

**170** Due to the bad economic situation, restrictive foreign currency measures were in force in Poland from 1936, see Z. Landau, *Polityka walutowa rządu polskiego w latach 1936–1939*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 1986, z. 2. Schulz had to ask Władysław Zawistowski, the head of the Minister’s Art Department of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, for support. See B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Władysław Zawistowski, no. I 61, p. 102–103.

**171** In Laski, there was a Center for the Care of the Blind, run in the Christian spirit by nuns from the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross.

**172** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 12, p. 281.

**173** *Idem*, *Ferdydurke*, “Skamander”, July–September 1938, vol. 12, issue XCVI–XCVIII.



u Knieviciu's si u teo socie spruci i to jat stauoviste  
"publikacne" i kulturne. Len zroca ojac uro uicavosti  
i baci si duicka Ktre zvidelo si z knubiozi jago i jago irocy,  
jat ueni tracica, icus, iucis, nevojistoscis - Otir tako tracis  
nevojistoscis i z wngstnie aone formey, rutytyje etc. Onytko  
ueni si objawiany.

Calo trudeosi zaprowadzenia tego gwstego zrenty stauo-  
viska jolgo ao tea - jat guboto i olencis zavoritot - ze  
uona onadocosi, lizdyc souur roneu, uicshylchikosi uolery  
do ovej traciej nevojistosci; uovo, Ktre jowstata jat i onytko  
i uue z kopolajzi jednostet, uie uadoje si do wyprockuwa  
tracis uoprocy individualnych - jest to uo roneho tyranije  
uocet otady polj, udoje si uauu ze uos uowala. Do jowrdaje  
Koneicnosi uoposcia si; u ovej trytyce nevojistocie jenuo o  
kook t. u. ze uietycho uousog otatowoi sicut, ale jenuo uouy  
u ty soucy: duiki i stalowoi sielic - uymeniwai dicit i uyceniwai  
sielic uymeniwajecy sig - goly: jowstata uozjo uie jat u otelawuwa  
ratienie jowstos uowiska uoluego, ale uicowleika, Ktry jowtycia  
sielic souego, jat uos coudy. Jat u tea uouuait abolutuego  
uotydo, Eku, Kueiucis i jowtycia uo. Ale dlitago tei "uorouene"  
uie jest u uenie uouue jowtyruwa uos uowolupicis - jat  
to tycho Katoshoja, stouic sig otwih rozi i Kory i Korta jat  
uoueuca. "Niedynalno" jat jowstata uoyto uopatyruwa  
Jedlug jowtyruoy uioch dajcy si uoprody i Kest. to  
Kueiucis dytawce i jowty oswicis i otowuwa u formey  
(i kulturny) Kueiucis uicawuwaicis tea: uytowuwa i  
peltuca uymeniwa ich uicawis.

Jak widim stid artykul dicit jowtycy si jowty uotkowic  
z uouue stauowislicia u ty spracie, z jowuwa uicawis lizdyc  
to, ze to uo ty uouuon jat blizij uicawislowey (dlu uouu)  
uoyti uicawislowey ja uouuyc ao quouie uoty uouuyci jat  
uouu: uicawis jowtyruoy i uicawis uouego ja. Jat u uicawis  
uiele otietey i otowokot uoycy i chowis, ze si go uoyuon  
Kkoda, ze uie uotot uouuyc uotyruuoy uouy jowtyruuwa  
pod uoylida stylizacyem. Poprost: jowty uicawis uouu  
uoty. Uoyntea tela otowuwa jowuwa ze uie uouu jow  
si i uouuyci sprac uicawis.

Co do dwoj Klerjana to trudeo uie uie jowtyruuwa  
polj: uie uouu tego otowu uocel u jowty uotyruuwa - jowty  
doje u uie uicawis otowu uicawis sig to tea: Eoyi? Tea  
jowty jat uouuyc uie uoylida uie jowty uotyruwa uie uie uouu  
souego - pod uoylida jowtyruuwa. 19. IV. 1919.



This book is bursting with an excess of ideas, overflowing with creative and destructive energy<sup>174</sup> – in other words, it reminded one of Schulz's *Book*. In his article, Schulz rather vividly described the complicated nature of *Ferdydurke* and the discovery made by Gombrowicz. This discovery was of the duality of human forms, which are divided into official ones, representing only a part of human existence, and those rejected, located behind the scenes, in the “annex of our self”<sup>175</sup>. Gombrowicz, according to Schulz, significantly exceeded the achievements of Freud in this dimension thanks to the fact that he used “convulsions of laughter” instead of seriousness. Freud considered these subconscious contents of our existence as a kind of pathology, while Gombrowicz, looking through the “lens of the grotesque”<sup>176</sup>, thought they were the essence of man<sup>177</sup>.

Schulz drew attention to Gombrowicz's discovery already during their exchange of letters in “Studio” (“I consider it a great merit that you, for the first time, guided our thoughts and feelings to these matters”), but it was only after reading *Ferdydurke* that he understood Gombrowicz's “conspiracies with the dragon” and the role of “pranking the crowd”<sup>178</sup> – which had previously caused him anxiety. All these conclusions about Gombrowicz's novel, Schulz referred to the entire culture, which consists of a thin official layer and the entire abyss, which is a littered cultural rubble: “It is a cesspool of immaturity, a realm of disgrace and shame, mismatches and shortcomings, a pathetic garbage dump of culture”<sup>179</sup>.

### Schulz's allegations against *Ferdydurke*

Interestingly, contrary to popular belief, Schulz's review is not a one-sided apotheosis of Gombrowicz's novel. Schulz noticed some theoretical imperfections in *Przedmowa do Filidora dzieckiem podszytego*. The chapter outlines the program of the change to which artists and writers are to be subjected, but only the second-rate ones – and this reservation worried Schulz. Gombrowicz wrote: “Believe me: there is a great difference between an artist who has already come true and a bunch of half-artists and quarter-artists who just want to come true. And what befits an artist who is already finished in his entire profile has a different meaning in yourself [...] Believe me, it is high time to develop and establish the attitude of a second-rate writer, otherwise all people will feel sick”<sup>180</sup>. Schulz noted that creating exceptions in this way is harmful to the whole concept. In his opinion,

**174** Idem, *Ferdydurke*, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 147–148.

**175** Ibidem, p. 144.

**176** Ibid p. 142–144.

**177** Experiments with form were therefore a path for Gombrowicz to achieve full humanity.

**178** B. Schulz, *Do Witolda Gombrowicza*, p. 213 and 216.

**179** Idem, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 145.

**180** W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, p. 69 and 71.



Gombrowicz was afraid of the one-sidedness of his own theory, which is an inherent feature of every great system of thought. Moreover, he was very concerned about the problematic distinction between first-rate and second-rate writers. The inaccuracy of this division seemed to Schulz unworthy of the “master of relativism and believer in concreteness”, that is, of the author of *Ferdydurke*. As a consequence, Schulz demonstrated the “imbalance” of Gombrowicz’s ideology, which the creator himself had “betrayed” because he limited it with exceptions. “The exceptions that Gombrowicz makes weaken the credit of his theory”<sup>181</sup>.

Schulz also pointed to the predecessor of *Ferdydurke*, which was, in his opinion, “premature and therefore ineffective”<sup>182</sup> – that is, Karol Irzykowski’s *Pałuba*. A similar conclusion was also presented by Artur Sandauer in a letter to Schulz of July 11, 1938: “I have recently read *Pałuba*; an excellent book. The theme is almost identical to the one I came up with in *Ferdydurke*; but maybe a little shallower, because is strictly intellectual”<sup>183</sup>.

It is worth noting that today we do not know the exact content of the reading that took place on January 11, 1938 (this is a common error in many studies)<sup>184</sup>, but only its magazine version (with which Schulz was dissatisfied), after unidentified editorial corrections and perhaps also abbreviations. Schulz’s article was previously rejected by “Wiadomości Literackie” due to its excessive length.

Concerned, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz on this matter: “I’m afraid that ‘Tygodnik’ won’t publish it either – it would take up three pages! There are still ‘Sygnały’, but ‘Skamander’, even its April issue, would certainly be better”<sup>185</sup>. On January 23, Schulz informed Romana Halpern that Mieczysław Grydzewski had already accepted the text of the speech for publication<sup>186</sup> (“Grydzewski has already accepted it for Skamander, I just have to send it to him”<sup>187</sup>). However, the text was not included in the next issue, published in April–June, and had to wait for publication until July.

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**181** B. Schulz, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 148.

**182** Ibidem, p. 149.

**183** Idem, *Księga listów*, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 33, p. 310.

**184** For example: K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 327–328.

**185** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 10, p. 279.

**186** Together with the article about *Ferdydurke*, Schulz sent Artur Sandauer’s text about *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* to “Skamander”, but it was not published. Sandauer notes with regret: “The new ‘Skamander’ has already been published. Your article about Gombrowicz is there, but mine about you is not” – see. B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166; and a letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 34, p. 311.

**187** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 96, p. 162.

### July 1938: “One of the most profound analyses of *Ferdydurke*”

Shortly after the publication in “Skamander”, on July 19, 1938, Gombrowicz wrote to Schulz that he had read his review again and still considered it “the best article ever written about the book, comprehensive in its most important points”<sup>188</sup>. He also sent Schulz his comments to the text, which, in his opinion, lacked emphasis on the problem of the relationship between human personality and form – though Schulz raises this problem many times: “So far, man has seen himself through the prism of a ready and finished form, he has seen himself from the side of the official façade [...]. All the poor tailoring of his form, sewn with thick stitches, escaped his notice”<sup>189</sup>. In his summary, however, Gombrowicz emphasized that, apart from minor differences, Schulz’s thoughts almost coincide with his position on *Ferdydurke*. It seems that Schulz was not satisfied with this publication. Perhaps he was concerned with the changes that could have been made in the text by the editor of “Skamander”, Mieczysław Grydzewski – Schulz wrote about it to Gombrowicz in one of the missing letters. We only know Gombrowicz’s reply: “There are many great things in it [Schulz’s published speech] and many deep places and I’m surprised that you deny it [...] Grydz’s corrections did it good”<sup>190</sup>. Years later, Gombrowicz repeatedly mentioned and analysed Schulz’s conclusions contained in the article, considering it “one of the most profound analyses of *Ferdydurke*”<sup>191</sup>, and the reading itself simply an act of heroism. According to Jerzy Jarzębski, it was Schulz’s text published in “Skamander”, constituting “an enthusiastic, selfless apotheosis” of *Ferdydurke*, that paved the way for Gombrowicz “to the Polish Parnassus”<sup>192</sup>.

### July–October 1938: Depression, *Messiah*, Paris

In July 1938, in now-lost letters to Gombrowicz, Schulz wrote, among other things, about his poor health (Sandauer wrote to Schulz on July 5: “Gombrowicz also writes to me that he is concerned about your constant depression”<sup>193</sup>), as well as about the slowly emerging novel *Messiah*. These two issues were probably related. *Messiah* had been in the works for many years, and the creative process was to be additionally interrupted by a trip to Paris. Schulz did not reveal details

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 281–282.

<sup>189</sup> Idem, “*Ferdydurke*”, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 144.

<sup>190</sup> Idem, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 284.

<sup>191</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Testament*, p. 47.

<sup>192</sup> J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 55.

<sup>193</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 32, p. 309–310.

about *Messiah*, he only counted on a voice of support that would make him believe in the sense of continuing to write. On July 19, both Sandauer, who advised against going to Paris because of *Messiah*, and Gombrowicz wrote to him: “As for your *Messiah*, it is difficult for me to say anything, because I do not know this work even in its assumptions – if it gives you the opportunity to refresh yourself, so much the better! This postulate is important not for the sake of your art, but for yourself – mentally<sup>194</sup>.”

Ultimately, Schulz decided to go to Paris<sup>195</sup>, where he arrived on July 31, 1938. He left the French capital on August 26, 1938 – three days later, he wrote to Romana Halpern that he “got rid of some illusions, about a global career”<sup>196</sup>. Schulz’s triumph in Paris was to come only in the 1960s, when his stories were published, as Gombrowicz claimed: “with great honours”, when he was treated as “one of the greatest contemporary writers”<sup>197</sup>.

In October, Schulz stayed in Warsaw for a day and a half. He was in a bad mental state. He came to discuss cooperation with “Wiadomości Literackie”, but otherwise he did not meet anyone. He did not visit Romana Halpern or Sandauer, who both wanted to meet him. He also did not manage to meet Gombrowicz. Schulz’s depression is associated with political events<sup>198</sup> and the publication in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” about Egga van Haardt<sup>199</sup> – a young and talented artist who charmed both Schulz and Gombrowicz.

### June 1937 – August 1938: Egga van Haardt – “I really like this blonde”

The history of this fascination probably began in June 1937, when Haardt made her debut as an artist, exhibiting her works at Garliński’s Art Salon at ul. Mazowiecka 8 in Warsaw. The exhibition had a motto taken from *Treatise on Tailor’s Dummies*, which appeared in invitations and catalogues<sup>200</sup>. Moreover, the exhibition, consisting of one hundred and fifty cut-out pictures, also presented the “most deeply felt” series of illustrations for *The Street of Crocodiles*. The reviewer argued that “this book certainly had quite an influence on the final

**194** Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 13, p. 284.

**195** For more about Schulz’s trip to Paris, see Ł. Chomycz, *Wyjazd Brunona Schulza do Francji*, “Schulz / Forum” 11, 2018.

**196** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 110, p. 180.

**197** W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 278–279.

**198** In October 1938, Adolf Hitler annexed the Sudetenland, which was part of Czechoslovakia.

**199** See B. Schulz, *Egga van Haardt*, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, 2 października 1938, no. 40, p. 773–774.

**200** “Our creations will be as if they were makeshift, made for single use. If they are people, we will give them, for example, only one side of the face, one arm, one leg, exactly the one they will need” – see M. Wallis, *Wystawy. Egga Haardt*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 4 lipca 1937, no. 28 (714), p. 6.

formation of Egga Hardt's expression, and the sentence quoted at the beginning characterizes the entire exhibition very well"<sup>201</sup>.

Did Egga make contact with Schulz before her first opening, or was it only the publicity around the exhibition, referring to *The Street of Crocodiles*, that prompted Schulz to make acquaintance with the brilliant artist – it is not known<sup>202</sup>. They certainly already knew each other in late 1937. At that time, Gombrowicz also became interested in her. At the turn of 1937 and 1938, Egga visited him in Zakopane, of which he informed Schulz in a letter of January 9, 1938: "Haardt has arrived, I like this blonde very much, she is my type of woman, but she has already left"<sup>203</sup>. Schulz knew that Egga van Haardt was no longer in Zakopane because that day he was leaving Poznań, where they had met and talked for several days. Most likely he must have stayed at the apartment of hers and Jerzy Brodnicki's<sup>204</sup>. Gombrowicz probably mentioned Haardt in his subsequent letters, which Schulz had written about to Romana Halpern. In a letter of January 18, 1938, he wrote: "Gombrowicz likes Egga Haardt very much, he intends to continue making this acquaintance in Warsaw since she's made a great impression on him"<sup>205</sup>. Piotr Sitkiewicz notes that during this period both writers "entered into some unspecified competition for the affections of the newly met artist"<sup>206</sup>. Romana Halpern, a friend of Schulz and Gombrowicz, noticed this rivalry. She probably asked Schulz about it in one of the lost letters she sent to him in January 1938. She must have inquired asking about Schulz's commitment and his reaction to Gombrowicz's announcements. Schulz answered her question in a letter of January 23, 1938: "As for Egga Haardt – I am not involved, and the danger of involvement is not threatening for me at all. The only dangerous thing for me is a woman's strong emotional involvement. I am a reactive nature, and it happens to me, but even rarely. Nevertheless, I will write to Gombrowicz not to disturb me. It is nice of him to be so loyal in the matter"<sup>207</sup>. Gombrowicz had informed Schulz that he intended to continue his relationship with Egga – probably asking for his opinion or consent. Schulz declared his lack of involvement, apparently

**201** J. Stokowski, *Plastyka. Wystawa Eggi Haardt*, "ABC", 1 lipca 1937, no. 205, p. 4.

**202** Anna Kaszuba-Dębska suggests that they made the acquaintance during the exhibition – see A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, Gdańsk 2015, p. 272.

**203** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. III 9, p. 278. Even before Gombrowicz's letter was found, Piotr Sitkiewicz deduced from a mysterious note from *Kronos* that Gombrowicz must have met Egga in Zakopane: "Zakopane. Dom Bankowców (?). Skiwski's article. V. Erdt (?). Fear [...]" – see P. Sitkiewicz, *Bruno Schulz w Poznaniu*, "Schulz/Forum" 5, 2015, p. 138.

**204** On January 5, he wrote to Zenon Waśniewski: "Your letter reached me in Poznań, where I am staying with a certain friend [...] I am staying with very nice and intelligent people" – B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Zenon Waśniewski, no. I 48, p. 92.

**205** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 95, p. 161.

**206** P. Sitkiewicz, *Bruno Schulz w Poznaniu*, p. 138.

**207** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 96, p. 162.

Kochany Bruno,

Zawsze ja obywateli Twojego Liberałstwa  
 si i Cerkwie i obywateli Twojego oświecenia. Cerkwie  
 oświecenia, i obywateli to, ale gdzie u siebie w Twoim świecie  
 sportować, i redakcji podła ofiarę oświecenia i Twojej Haardt  
 polski i oświecenia nie u siebie. Właśnie oświecenia się Twoim  
 u siebie. Właśnie tego sprawa gwałtownie gwałtownie oświecenia, a to  
 z Twoim światem oświecenia i nie jestis pewny czy Haardt nie  
 dysponuje jakimiś abstrakcją: wyci nie u siebie. Cerkwie to  
 oświecenia i obywateli. Porównanie oświecenia, i porównanie C. u siebie  
 u siebie: si i C. sportować, ale u siebie u siebie, i  
 u siebie i obywateli przez gwałtownie si i C. tego oświecenia oświecenia  
 z sobą z sobą si i C. całkowicie i nieprzerwanie u siebie przez  
 Cerkwie to: afera i dysponować, i u siebie ducha u siebie  
 do siebie. Zwrócić to u siebie u siebie oświecenia oświecenia  
 decyzji z Twoim światem, gwałtownie oświecenia, i to u siebie co  
 u siebie: porównanie C, a to decyzji oświecenia oświecenia. Cerkwie  
 jest skomplikowany i gwałtownie oświecenia Twojej sportować,  
 jednakoż oświecenia C. u siebie oświecenia Twojej redakcji Książ  
<sup>u siebie u siebie</sup> u siebie, i tekst u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie.  
~~Stwierdzenie~~ u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie. u siebie  
 przywrócić u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie  
 z u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie  
 komentary i u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie u siebie

Nie jestem pewny czy zwrócić to po Twoim u siebie,  
 oświecenia oświecenia oświecenia Twojej oświecenia oświecenia, ale  
 oświecenia u siebie u siebie Twojej oświecenia. Porównanie oświecenia  
 oświecenia Twojej u siebie, jednakoż oświecenia oświecenia oświecenia i  
 oświecenia oświecenia si i C. u siebie oświecenia oświecenia i  
 oświecenia oświecenia; oświecenia; oświecenia; oświecenia; oświecenia  
 oświecenia oświecenia oświecenia, i oświecenia oświecenia i tak u siebie oświecenia  
 si. Ale decyzji, sam. Twoj u siebie.

Letter from Witold Gombrowicz to Bruno Schulz from October 1938, Museum of Literature in Warsaw

giving Gombrowicz his permission to develop the bond with Haardt<sup>208</sup>. Anna Kaszuba-Dębska is perhaps right when she claims that Schulz was primarily interested in getting in touch with Thomas Mann<sup>209</sup>, which Egga van Haardt and Jerzy Brodnicki were supposed to make easier for him<sup>210</sup>.

In February 1938, Schulz continued to correspond with Egga, as reported by Romana Halpern (letter of February 21): “I constantly receive enthusiastic comments about my book from Egga Haardt and her friend”<sup>211</sup>. They also talked about illustrations for *The Comet*, which was to be published soon. In March, the correspondence stopped: “Egga Haardt became silent, too”<sup>212</sup>. The artist replied on March 23, explaining the silence with work and personal trouble. She announced that Schulz’s novella *Die Heimkehr*, along with her drawings, would be presented to Thomas Mann around April 10, when Brodnicki’s mother was supposed to reach Zurich<sup>213</sup>. Egga’s letter was extremely kind and friendly. Their relationship seemed to be at its best. On August 21, *The Comet* was finally published in “Wiadomości Literackie”, along with eight illustrations by Haardt<sup>214</sup>.

### October 1938: Manipulated article in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”

However, everything changed on October 2, when “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” published an article titled “Egga van Haardt”. Before publication, Schulz made the manuscript available to the artist so that she could remove the fragments that would be, in her opinion, too intimate. However, “Tygodnik” received a modified text containing completely new sentences and thoughts that were not written by Schulz and which he himself considered “highly distasteful and scandalous in form”<sup>215</sup>. This was a great cause for concern for him. “Recently, I feel very sorry for Egga Haardt, who turned out to be a common scandal-monger, blackmailer and cheat”<sup>216</sup> – he wrote in a letter of October 13. At that

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**208** What is surprising, perhaps, is the fact that in Gombrowicz’s two-volume biography, the name of Egga van Haardt was mentioned only once, and only in the context of Bruno Schulz’s article.

**209** A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, p. 275 and 279.

**210** Egga and “her friend” (as Schulz calls Brodnicki) compared *Sanatory Under the Sign of the Hourglass* with Mann’s *The Tales of Jacob* and claimed that they would be able to provide Schulz with contact with Mann himself. As a result, around April 10, 1938, Brodnicki’s mother, traveling to Zurich, brought Mann a novella by Schulz entitled *Die Heimkehr* with illustrations by Egga van Haardt.

**211** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 99, p. 166–167.

**212** Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 103, p. 172.

**213** See Ibidem, letter from Egga van Haardt, no. III 39, p. 316.

**214** See B. Schulz, *Kometa*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 21 sierpnia 1938, no. 35 (774), p. 2–3.

**215** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 111, p. 181.

**216** Ibidem.

time, he only contacted Gombrowicz: “Apart from Gombrowicz, I do not receive letters from anyone – I am completely abandoned”<sup>217</sup>. He consulted Gombrowicz, too, about the article on Egga van Haardt. He sent him his statement regarding the manipulated text and made Gombrowicz his representative for negotiations with Waclaw Czarski, editor-in-chief of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”. It was not clear from Schulz’s statement who edited the text, so Czarski announced that he would have to reveal that the changes were made by Egga van Haardt herself. As Gombrowicz reported to his friend, then “the matter would have taken a more serious turn, and since your letters show that you are not sure whether Haardt has any advantages, I could not take it on my own responsibility”<sup>218</sup>. If Schulz were to decide to publish his explanations, Gombrowicz advised to modify them in such a way that they would not require additional comments from the editors, he also suggested that it should be noted that “the text was changed where it talks about art”<sup>219</sup>. However, he advised Schulz to keep calm – he announced that he would inform other editorial offices about this manipulation in order to avoid comments and press reactions. He also argued that Schulz had no reason to worry about the public, because “it doesn’t know anything anyway”<sup>220</sup>.

### October 1938: Fear of Egga

Ultimately, Schulz followed Gombrowicz’s advice and did not issue any statement regarding the manipulated text. On October 29, 1938, he wrote to Romana Halpern: “I will take the opportunity to tell you what made me let this forgery go unpunished and not investigate the matter”<sup>221</sup>. It is not known what “advantages” of Egga prompted Schulz to remain silent on this matter; Piotr Sitkiewicz even writes about the writer’s “indefinite fear” – which he himself admitted in a letter to Romana Halpern: “I am afraid of her, because she is a person capable of anything”<sup>222</sup>.

Perhaps it was all about the same thing, i.e. contact with Tomasz Mann. Schulz probably still hoped to make contact with the German writer, and an open conflict with Egga, the author of the illustrations for *Die Heimkehr*, could make it difficult for him. It is not known whether, after the publication in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, Schulz or Gombrowicz ever contacted Haardt – a “participant of the

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<sup>217</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>218</sup> Ibidem, letter from Witold Gombrowicz, no. I 15, p. 286.

<sup>219</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>220</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>221</sup> Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 112, p. 183.

<sup>222</sup> Ibidem, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 111, p. 181–182.

early beginnings” transformed into a smile, “the young ephebus”, “Salamandra”, which possessed “all the nuances of creation”<sup>223</sup>.

At the end of October 1938, Schulz mainly exchanged letters with the author of *Ferdydurke* – “My reduction of correspondence is general and apart from Gombrowicz I communicate with no one”<sup>224</sup> – apart from Romana Halpern, of course, to whom he reported his loneliness.

### Emil Breiter – Bruno Schulz’s literary school?

Schulz’s and Gombrowicz’s respective works have been compared many times. They themselves emphasized primarily the differences between them, even though Gombrowicz admitted that the common element of their work was literary mystification<sup>225</sup>, experimenting with form<sup>226</sup> and hermeticity<sup>227</sup>. We should also mention the use of the grotesque, trash, parody and combining autobiographical and literary themes<sup>228</sup>. Sometimes some plot similarities were pointed out, for example *Ferdydurke* was claimed to be based on an idea from Schulz’s short story entitled “Emeryt” [A Pensioner]<sup>229</sup>. Their respective texts were juxtaposed in a rather unfortunate manner by Emil Breiter in an article published on May 29, 1938 in “Wiadomości Literackie”. While positively reviewing *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, Breiter wrote in the summary that Schulz created a literary school, which included, among others, Gombrowicz<sup>230</sup>. Of course, this was not true and must have made both writers uncomfortable. Schulz, perhaps at Gombrowicz’s instigation, wrote a correction to the editor of “Wiadomości Literackie”, regarding Breiter’s argument. It was an uncomfortable situation for him. He had the impression that little was said or written about *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, and one of the few reviews required his intervention. He tried to handle it in “as delicate a form as possible”, so as not to offend a favourable critic, and at the same time do justice to Gombrowicz<sup>231</sup>.

**223** Bruno Schulz, *Egga van Haardt*, in: idem, *Szkice krytyczne*, p. 150–151.

**224** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, no. I 112, p. 183.

**225** W. Gombrowicz, *Łańcuch nietaktów*, p. 278–279.

**226** Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 663.

**227** Witold Gombrowicz, letter to François Bondy of February 21, 1962, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie. Świadectwa i dokumenty 1963–1969*, przekład O. Hedemann, M. Ochab, J. Juryś, W. Karpiński, J. Jarzębski, tekst polskiego wydania przejrzał J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1993, p. 93.

**228** Based on these similarities, Aleksander Fiut includes Schulz and Gombrowicz among postmodernist writers in the *avant la lettre* school, see A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowką z Wilczej*, p. 162–163.

**229** P. Kuncewicz, *Schulz i Gombrowicz*, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1984, no. 30, p. 27–30.

**230** E. Breiter, “*Sanatorjum pod Klepsydrą*” Schulza, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 29 maja 1938, no. 23 (762), p. 4.

**231** It is interesting that in a letter from May 28, 1938 to Romana Halpern (“You have probably read Breiter’s review about me”), Schulz not only described the review that was published a day later, i.e. on May 29, 1938, but also had already written and sent to Mieczysław Grydzewski his corrections.



“I felt very sorry for Breiter, but I considered it a duty of loyalty to Gombrowicz”<sup>232</sup>. Schulz’s corrective text was published in “Wiadomości Literackie” on June 19, 1938<sup>233</sup>. In it, Schulz proved the complete originality and uniqueness of the author *Ferdydurke*: “He operates in a completely different dimension of reality than I do, he belongs – despite appearances suggesting the contrary – to a completely different writing family and to a different spiritual formation”<sup>234</sup>. Developing this idea, he used phrases such as: “incommensurability of internal worlds”, “difference”, “individuality”, “autonomy”, “distinctiveness”. So what was the result of this combination of the works of such different and independent writers? Schulz replied: “Our names and work must have been associated by some accident, by coincidence, that is, the relative simultaneity of the occurrence, the bluntness of the treatment of conventional reality (having different sources in both cases), and especially the difficulty to classify the texts, common to both”<sup>235</sup>. However, Schulz and Gombrowicz believed that a strong voice from the outside was still needed, clearly demarcating their work. Both of them individually suggested to Sandauer that he should write an article in this tone: “A few days ago I received a letter from Gombrowicz in which (like you) he proposes that I write an article demarcating your works in opposition to Breiter”<sup>236</sup>.

Despite Schulz’s immediate reaction to the review in “Wiadomości Literackie”, the myth of the “Schulz group” continued to circulate widely<sup>237</sup>. An example is Stefan Pomer’s writing about Franz Kafka: “Suffice it to say that in Poland one of his followers, Bruno Schulz, has already managed to create something of a literary school and the most interesting young Polish prose writers, such as Rudnicki, Gombrowicz, Ważyk, Kuczyński, Otwinowski, etc., actually come from this Jewish-Czech writer”<sup>238</sup>.

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**232** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, I 106, p. 176.

**233** The correction was printed on the last page, in the correspondence section, under the title *Schulz i Gombrowicz*, see B. Schulz, *Schulz i Gombrowicz. Do redaktora “Wiadomości Literackich”*, “Wiadomości Literackie”, 19 czerwca 1938, no. 26 (765), p. 8.

**234** B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Mieczysław Grydzewski, I 72, p. 127.

**235** Ibidem.

**236** Ibidem, letter from Artur Sandauer, no. III 32, p. 309.

**237** Even though both writers firmly denied that they represented a common literary school, in Japan the works of Schulz and Gombrowicz were published together. In 1967, a volume was published in Tokyo containing *The Street of Crocodiles*, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos*. In 1977, Schulz’s works were re-published in Japanese, this time accompanied by *Ferdydurke*.

**238** S. Pomer, *Literatura na szerokim świecie*, “5ta rano”, 16 października 1938, no. 287 (2887), p. 11.

## Sandauer and Vogler

Gombrowicz wrote years later that Schulz and himself were more connected by public opinion than they were by each other<sup>239</sup>. Of ground-breaking importance here were primarily the articles of Artur Sandauer, who included both writers in the “school of mythologists”<sup>240</sup>, and Henryk Vogler, who wrote: “Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz are the two most outstanding and most characteristic young Polish fiction writers. They lock themselves within the boundaries of their individuality – those features that distinguish Polish literature from other European literatures”<sup>241</sup>. In turn, Artur Sandauer, shortly after Schulz’s speech on *Ferdynand*, on January 22, 1938, gave a lecture in Cracow, in the hall of the Jewish Theatre Society at ul. Stolarska 9, titled *Fantasy and Weirdness in the New Polish Literature* dedicated to the works of Schulz and Gombrowicz<sup>242</sup>.

## National-radical criticism

But Gombrowicz and Schulz were compared not only by critics enthusiastic about their work. Literary critics associated with the national movement were also eager to compare them and attack as representatives of the so-called young literature. Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote in the national-radical “Prosto z Mostu” (February 10, 1935) about poverty of thought and ideas, the social harmfulness and anti-Polish character of such works: “You will need the devil to find something Polish in the books by Choromański, Gombrowicz, Rudnicki, Schultz and Uniłowski”. The Polishness of their works probably lies only in the fact that they are written in Polish, not always in a grammatically correct language, not to mention its spiritual purity”<sup>243</sup>. Gombrowicz reacted to these accusations by sending his response to the weekly’s editorial office, which was published on March 3, 1935<sup>244</sup>. He noticed that it was quite risky to include the forty-year-old Schulz among young artists, and that for his own artistic development,

**239** W. Gombrowicz, *Wspomnienia polskie*, p. 92.

**240** See A. Sandauer, *Szkoła mitologów. Bruno Schulz i Witold Gombrowicz*, “Pion”, 6 lutego 1938, no. 5 (226), p. 4. On the day the article was published, Schulz wrote to Romana Halpern: “‘Pion’ has published an article by Sandauer as a review [...]” and a dozen or so days later he emphasized that there was “a beautiful article about me (mainly) and Gombrowicz” – see B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, letter to Romana Halpern, 197 i 199, p. 164 and 166.

**241** H. Vogler, *Dwa światy romantyczne. O Brunonie Schulzu i Witoldzie Gombrowiczu*, “Skamander”, październik–grudzień 1938, z. 99/101, p. 246. See also: H. Vogler, *Świat rozszczętkowany*, “Nowy Dziennik”, 27 listopada 1937, no. 326, p. 8.

**242** *Z teatru, literatury i sztuki*, “Nowy Dziennik”, 20 stycznia 1938, no. 20, p. 15.

**243** J. Andrzejewski, *Młoda literatura oskarżona*, “Prosto z Mostu”, 10 lutego 1935, no. 6, p. 4.

**244** See W. Gombrowicz, *Atmosfera i kot. (W odpowiedzi p. J. Andrzejewskiemu)*, “Prosto z Mostu”, 3 marca 1935, no. 9, p. 4.

the cat incident and friendship with Kowalski were more important than the war. He expressed his respect for national values<sup>245</sup>, but he questioned the necessity of national culture to remain the only kind of creative work. He called the categorical assessment of young literature completely accidental and baseless: “Let us imagine that Schulz, Rudnicki and me were run over by a tram while traveling in Aleje Ujazdowskie. Only Choromański and Uniłowski would remain, the percentage of disease in young literature would decrease significantly, and then, with equal ease and eloquence, Mr. Andrzejewski could write an article showing how the post-war atmosphere had a positive impact on artistic creativity”<sup>246</sup>.

### Ignacy Fik and “Literatura choromaniaków”

At the same time, on February 23, 1935, “Tygodnik Artistów” also published an article by Ignacy Fik “Literatura choromaniaków”<sup>247</sup>, in which both Gombrowicz and Schulz<sup>248</sup> were included in the mainstream of pathological-manic literature (Fik uses such phrases as: chatter, delirium, dull bureaucracy, disgusting exhibitionism, anti-social literature, psychological reportage mania) that is created by “homosexuals, exhibitionists and psychopaths, degenerates, drug addicts, people with chronic stomach diseases, permanently living in hospitals, people who cannot distinguish between reality and sleep, hypochondriacs, neurasthenics, misanthropes”<sup>249</sup>, and also fanatics, psychic reporters and hacks. Fik wrote the following about Schulz, specifically: “The air and people of his book smell of the madness of a man’s brain overwhelmed with a disease, addicted to dreams”; and this is what he wrote about Gombrowicz: “Gombrowicz’s columns are often just the compromising deliriums of an idiot”<sup>250</sup>. These and other aggressive attacks on avant-garde work may have brought Schulz and Gombrowicz closer together than Sandauer’s enthusiastic comparisons. In this case, Gombrowicz again took up the defence and said directly: “We are not sick and we are not maniacs”. He also ridiculed the author’s attempt to put so many different artists into one category called “disease”. In Gombrowicz’s view, maniacal and aggressive attacks on artists looking for a new path were, in fact, symptoms of a disorder: “Columnists would like to deal with people too easily, too cheaply handle people of hard work,

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**245** Perhaps he needed his answer to be published in the weekly, or perhaps he did not want to be beaten by ONR’s militants. He mentioned this fear in a conversation with Dominik de Roux.

**246** W. Gombrowicz, *Atmosfera i kot. (W odpowiedzi p. J. Andrzejewski)*, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 150.

**247** See I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1–2.

**248** Additionally: Witkiewicz, Kaden-Bandrowski, Choromański, Krzywicka, Rudnicki, Ważyk, Uniłowski.

**249** I. Fik, *Literatura choromaniaków*, p. 1.

**250** *Ibidem*, p. 2.

of low income and of a different spiritual structure. This is by no means healthy. On the contrary, it is pure morbidity”<sup>251</sup>.

### Superficial similarities

Articles by Sandauer and Vogler, and probably also by Andrzejewski and Fik, and by Maria Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska<sup>252</sup>, had a great impact on linking the work and artistic biographies of Schulz and Gombrowicz, but their correspondence in “Studio” and Schulz’s reading about *Ferdydurke* in the headquarters of the trade union were of huge importance, too. The writers themselves worked to make the public and critics associate their names with each other. Works comparing their work are still being written to this day. According to Jerzy Jarzębski, however, the literary similarities between the prose of Schulz and Gombrowicz are superficial: “In the former’s, the ontology of literary reality assumes the interchangeability of shapes-masks, strictly subordinated to “mythological syntax”, which is ruled by an exemplary order; in the latter’s, metamorphoses are a surprise not only for the characters, but also for the narrator – and the author; reality escapes the creator’s control”<sup>253</sup>. What unites them, according to Vogler, is a single moment in which “both approach life not through the wide-open gate of naturalistic epic observation, but through the backdoor of lyricism, through a side door hidden deep from the eyes of sober, normal observers in the thicket of enchanted flowers [...]. But immediately after crossing this mysterious passage, Schulz’s and Gombrowicz’s paths go their separate ways”<sup>254</sup>. Differences between artistic inclinations of both writers revealed themselves most vividly during their open correspondence in the monthly “Studio” – despite a stormy exchange of thoughts, concepts and blows, no agreement was reached between them. Gombrowicz and Schulz actually spoke different languages. Aleksander Fiut writes that this duel could not have succeeded: “Both fencers fight with various arms and were taught fencing in other schools”<sup>255</sup>.

**251** W. Gombrowicz, “O myślach chudych”, in: idem, *Varia 1*, p. 193.

**252** Maria Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska is the author of a story that is a pastiche of the work of, among others, Schulz and Gombrowicz, which was published on December 19, 1937, in “Apel”, a supplement to “Kurier Poranny” – see M. Wrześniewska-Kruczkowska, *Psychostenik. Gombrowiczowi, Karpińskiemu i Schulzowi*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016; as well as P. Sitkiewicz, *À la manière de Bruno Schulz. Pastisz parodia i naśladowanie Brunona Schulza w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, “Schulz/Forum” 8, 2016, p. 124–125.

**253** J. Jarzębski, *Gra w Gombrowicza*, p. 208.

**254** H. Vogler, *Dwa światy romantyczne. O Brunonie Schulzu i Witoldzie Gombrowiczu*, “Skamander”, październik–grudzień 1938, z. 99/101, p. 246.

**255** A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorową z Wilczej*, p. 158.

### 1939: Transatlantic to Argentina

Gombrowicz and Schulz both tried to publish their books abroad. In the spring of 1939, they met the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, but the meeting did not bring the expected results<sup>256</sup>. Gombrowicz was already thinking about leaving Poland. In July 1939, he received a tourist visa and permission from the military authorities to go abroad. On July 28, he left Warsaw, and a day later he sailed from Gdynia to the port of Buenos Aires, where he arrived on August 20, 1939<sup>257</sup>. Once there, he had to face a new, difficult reality and numerous problems in the life of a lonely emigrant.

### 1941–1945: Concern for the fate of a friend

It is unknown whether Gombrowicz wrote any letters to Bruno Schulz after reaching Argentina. He probably had no contact with him since the outbreak of the war. He was tormented by uncertainty about his friend's fate, and he asked others if they knew anything. In June 1941, he wrote to Julian Tuwim: "Don't you know what is happening to B. Schulz?"<sup>258</sup>. On October 15, 1941, he wrote a dramatic letter to Józef Wittlin, in which he complained about his hopeless situation and asked for help. When writing about his problems, he did not forget about Schulz<sup>259</sup>.

Wittlin tried to help Gombrowicz, but he had no information whatsoever. On December 16, 1941, Gombrowicz sent him another letter in which he informed: "I am extremely concerned about the fate of Bruno Schulz, with whom I was a great friend"<sup>260</sup>. It is unknown when and from whom he learned about the death of Schulz, who was murdered on November 19, 1942. He certainly knew this already in January 1945, when he wrote a letter to Adam Mauersberg: "Write to me about your fate and the fate of your friends. How did Bruno die?"<sup>261</sup>. Mauersberg, their mutual friend, did not know the answer to this question. Two years later, Gombrowicz repeated his request: "I would like to know more about the circumstances of poor Bruno's death"<sup>262</sup>. In response to these questions,

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**256** Italian publishing houses which Schulz approached already in 1937 were not interested in publishing his works – see J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 82 and 499.

**257** See K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, vol. 1, p. 355.

**258** Quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 407.

**259** W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę. Korespondencja, część pierwsza. Witold Gombrowicz. Józef Wittlin. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Artur Sandauer*, układ, przedmowy, przypisy J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1996, p. 7.

**260** *Ibidem*, p. 8.

**261** *Idem*, *Listy do Adama Mauersberga*, Łódź 1988, letter no. 1.

**262** *Ibidem*, letter no. 2.

he received false information from someone that Schulz had died in a German concentration camp.

### 1955–1960: “Bruno? Write about him? No”.

After the war, Gombrowicz often recalled his friendship with Bruno Schulz – in conversations with friends<sup>263</sup>, in private letters to family and friends, as well as in the memoirs he prepared for publication. Most often, these are short mentions, reminiscences of the old friendship. In 1955, he wrote in *Dziennik*: “Bruno Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles*, a thing of a different kind, of high rank”<sup>264</sup>. In 1956, he received an article from Sandauer about Schulz’s work titled “Rzeczywistość zdegradowana” [Degraded Reality]. On September 7, 1956, Gombrowicz wrote back that he thanked and paid tribute to such an in-depth and extensive text “about poor Bruno, with whom, as you know, I enjoyed a friendship”<sup>265</sup>. Gombrowicz also emphasizes that Schulz himself and his work are a topic that could be talked about a lot. Despite this declaration, at that time he had no need to write longer texts about his old friend. In correspondence from September 19, 1956, in response to a question from his older brother for a text about Schulz replied: “Bruno? Write about him? No”<sup>266</sup>. In 1957, *Ferdydurke* was published again in Poland, which was widely commented on in the national press. Gombrowicz discussed the matter, too, in *Dziennik*: “They didn’t understand exactly everything about me [...] I’m resigned”<sup>267</sup>. This feeling of resignation made Gombrowicz come back to the classic text that most accurately permeated his work and the mechanisms that govern it. Contemporary critics did not notice the full depth of meaning of the novel, but “Bruno Schulz saw it in his study about *Ferdydure*, printed in the pre-war ‘Skamander’”<sup>268</sup>. His insight was so penetrating, Gombrowicz recalled, that through *Ferdydurke* Schulz reached the “most important” issue in it, and at the same time touched his subsequent works – as if Schulz’s text was a prophetic discussion of Gombrowicz’s entire oeuvre. In 1960, still in his *Diary*, he wrote: “I owe a lot to several writers who supported me, starting with the outstanding Bruno Schulz”<sup>269</sup>. Was this “today” related to the first translations of Schulz’s single stories into English and French?

**263** See R. Pla, “Wywiad przeprowadzony w listopadzie 1978 w Buenos Aires”, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Argentynie. Świadectwa i dokumenty 1939–1969*, przekł. Z. Chądzyńska, A. Husarska, Kraków 2005, p. 44.

**264** W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 257.

**265** Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 179.

**266** Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 62.

**267** Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 339.

**268** Ibidem, p. 342–343.

**269** Ibidem, p. 584.

Or maybe with the publishing house's plans of René Julliard, who was soon to present Schulz's work to French-speaking readers?

### 1961: Could Gombrowicz be jealous of Schulz?

The year 1961 turned out to be a breakthrough for Gombrowicz's memories about Schulz. It was then, in July 1961, that the first comprehensive collection of Schulz's stories in French was published under the title *Traité des mannequins*<sup>270</sup>, which was a selection of stories from *Sklepy cynamonowe* and *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą*. On July 3, 1961, Gombrowicz informed his brother: "Schulz's *Sklepy cynamonowe* [...] was published in Paris. I won't be surprised if Bruno now climbs to the highest rungs of world literature because his is an excellent art, though too Kafkaesque for my taste<sup>271</sup>. In a letter of July 17, 1961, he wrote to Artur Sandauer that he had predicted this book would be a great success because it was "literature for writers, poetry for poets"<sup>272</sup>. Another time, on August 7, 1961, he wondered: "I am very curious about what will happen next in other countries with this truly great prose"<sup>273</sup>. It seems, therefore, that Gombrowicz looked at the French edition of Schulz's works with curiosity and optimism. However, Maurice Nadeau, responsible for publishing *Traité des mannequins*, claimed that Gombrowicz was an egocentric who could not come to terms with the idea that his publisher had to deal with other writers as well: "He did not accept it with great joy that, for example, I was interested in Bruno Schulz"<sup>274</sup>. Indeed, something strange happened shortly after the publication of Schulz's works. Gombrowicz resented Sandauer for avoiding conversations with him about Schulz, and for making the publication of his works in French, together with Nadeau, a secret: "Why exactly are you avoiding one subject with me? S... S... Sch... Sch... Schulz...? Do you perhaps think you cheated on me with him? Do you think I am jealous? Do you accuse me of persecuting him?!"<sup>275</sup>. In a letter from October 6, 1961, Gombrowicz explained: "This dunce, Sandauer, apparently avoids writing to me about Bruno, as if he were ashamed or afraid, or maybe thought that I am jealous – I wrote a few words for him to listen to"<sup>276</sup>. Could Gombrowicz be jealous of Schulz? He seems to have reacted with

**270** B. Schulz, *Traité des mannequins*, traduit du polonais par S. Arlet, A. Kosko, G. Lisowski, G. Sidre, préface d'A. Sandauer, Paris 1961.

**271** W. Gombrowicz, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 273.

**272** See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 247.

**273** Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 279.

**274** M. Nadeau, "Wspomnienie spisane w Paryżu 17 czerwca 1986", in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 99.

**275** See W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 248.

**276** Idem, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 283.

counterarguments to every idolatrous mention Sandauer made of Schulz's work, for example raising the issue of the excessive "Kafkesque-ness" of Schulz's prose. It was Gombrowicz style to have a different opinion, to provoke and to stand your ground. He also explained this to some extent: "And the fact that I am not that much of an admirer of his art as you are... well, what's the big deal?"<sup>277</sup>. Indeed, Gombrowicz repeatedly emphasized his appreciation of Schulz's work, but almost always pointed out its shortcomings, too – for example in a letter to Józef Wittlin of June 25, 1952: "Bruno is a wonderful talent. Some of his things are dazzling (but he couldn't combine poetry with prose, he couldn't unite these two aspects of the world – which is extremely important to me"<sup>278</sup>, or to Sandauer himself: "I also admire him as an artist, some of his works are brilliant – only his placement in actuality does not seem fertile enough to me"<sup>279</sup>. Gombrowicz appreciated Schulz's prose, but he did not worship it – could this have been the cause of the conflict?

Perhaps Sandauer and Nadeau were afraid of the hot-tempered writer who fought for his fame at every turn. Otto Mertens, Gombrowicz's doctor, recalled that the author of *Ferdydurke* was amazed to see illustrations for Schulz's stories on the walls of his house. It turned out that Mertens was fascinated by *The Street of Crocodiles* so much so that he commissioned artist friends to make paintings inspired by "The Tailor's Dummies". "When Gombrowicz saw them, he didn't like them very much. He also didn't like the fact that I was a Schulz enthusiast and didn't know Gombrowicz yet!"<sup>280</sup>. But in the case of translating Schulz's stories into French, there could be no competition. Gombrowicz himself stated that Schulz's greatness worked to his advantage<sup>281</sup>. It is also untrue that the French edition of Schulz's stories was kept secret. Sandauer informed Gombrowicz about this in at least four letters: July 14 and 20, 1959, March 5, 1960 and May 26, 1960<sup>282</sup>. He himself wrote in *Dziennik* that he had known about this edition for a long time<sup>283</sup>. The book was supposed to be published a year earlier, but the publishing house had problems with obtaining the copyright from Ella Schulz-Podstolska<sup>284</sup>. The cause of the conflict must have been different.

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**277** See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 249.

**278** Ibidem, p. 46.

**279** Ibidem, p. 247.

**280** O. Mertens, "Wypowiedź spisana w Berlinie 24 października 1984", in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 252.

**281** "Not only does Bruno's greatness not bother me, but from a personal point of view, it may be useful in France, because it also draws attention to me" – W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 248.

**282** For all listed letters, see W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*.

**283** "I have known about this edition for a long time, and have been preparing it with the sweat of my brow" – W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik...*, p. 654.

**284** See Idem, *Walka o sławę*, p. 240.



On July 17, 1961, Gombrowicz sent a long letter to Sandauer, almost entirely devoted to Schulz. He declared that he had already received *Traité des mannequins*, praised the introduction by Sandauer, called the translation very good and announced his willingness to write a longer text about Schulz for *Dziennik*. He opened up, declaring that when he saw the French edition of his friend's works, he was moved: "This book brings back many memories for me. Did you know that I was a good friend of his and that he fought a heroic battle for *Ferdydurke*?"<sup>285</sup>. He also honestly assessed Schulz's work: "As for his art, I have never been a 100% reader of it – I always thought it was too narrow and too arbitrary, also detached, not closely related to reality [...] For me, Bruno was too much of a poet, too much of an artist. (He had a feeling of the insignificance of art, but he knew nothing to oppose it.) And yet too close to Kafka. There is much to say about the matter"<sup>286</sup>. The letter clearly shows that everything related to Schulz was extremely important to Gombrowicz – because of his art, shared friendship and memories. Sandauer ignored this personal tone. This seems to have enraged Gombrowicz, who hoped that he would also reach Schulz through their mutual friend, who was an admirer of his work. Therefore, there is no indication that Gombrowicz was really jealous of Schulz. On the contrary, he never expressed any envy.

### 1961: Schulz in France – "We are a couple again"

Schulz's entry into the French publishing market was for Gombrowicz like the return of a long-forgotten friend who has finally entered the wide waters of world literature. "There is something strange and perhaps even slightly touching to me in the fact that we are a couple again – this time in the wide world"<sup>287</sup>. For Gombrowicz, it was a moving experience, which he mentioned several times in his correspondence from that period. On July 3, 1961, he wrote: "This meeting with him after so many years at Julliard moved me quite a bit, I was close to him and he was the first to make a fuss about *Ferdydurke*"<sup>288</sup>. He used a similar tone in a letter of August 1, 1961 to Maurice Nadeau himself. He wrote about *Traité des mannequins*, claiming that Sandauer's analysis was great, Nadeau's introduction seemed "electrifying", and the entire publication would, in his opinion, be a great success<sup>289</sup>.

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<sup>285</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 246.

<sup>286</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 240.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247.

<sup>288</sup> *Idem*, *Listy do rodziny*, p. 273.

<sup>289</sup> Gombrowicz would later repeat more or less the same theses in *Fragment z dziennika*.

He also admitted his emotion again: “I am excited by the fact that I am meeting him again after twenty years, this time through your publishing series”<sup>290</sup>. Inspired by the French edition of Schulz’s stories, Gombrowicz decided to write a longer memoir. On August 7, 1961, he finished writing “Fragment z dziennika” [Fragment from a diary] dedicated to Schulz. The text was published in November 1961 in the Paris monthly “Kultura”<sup>291</sup>.

Gombrowicz’s account from that text is, above all, a literary creation. Aleksander Fiut will even call it fabrication and mystification<sup>292</sup>. Gombrowicz himself admitted: “I will probably write about Bruno in a somewhat shocking way, because I do not want to fall into the convention of these ‘memoirs’”<sup>293</sup>. So, based partly on facts from their shared biographies, he created an image of a one-sided friendship that was maintained by Schulz himself and in which he never repaid him in any way. There is no longer any talk of a “great friendship” or “poor Bruno” or a “great late friend” about whom Gombrowicz asked with concern, and then mentioned him in his letters. In this case, Gombrowicz dazzled with the image of Schulz’s outstretched hand that falls into the void – and in his opinion this was an extremely Schulzian predicament. “I did not return these feelings to him, I gave him terribly little of myself, almost nothing”<sup>294</sup> – these words alone show what Gombrowicz was striving for. To destroy the form of the parable of the dead friend that everyone would probably expect. “A provocation then? Surely. But what is it aimed at? First of all, at genre norms that control the recipient’s expectations”<sup>295</sup>. That is why Gombrowicz chose to highlight the “weirdness” of their relationship. That is why he wrote that he did not trust Schulz or his art and that he never read his stories honestly because they bored him. He listed an entire catalogue of what made them different: in physical, racial, class, spiritual, artistic terms – and came to the inevitable, but absurd, conclusion that “if there was anyone in Polish art who was 100% opposed to me, it was him”<sup>296</sup>.

## 1969–2021

Gombrowicz died on July 24, 1969 in Vence, France. An entry in *The Diary* was the last text he devoted to Schulz. However, in 1977, the Paris Literary Institute published *Wspomnienia polskie*, found a year earlier by the deceased writer’s wife, Rita Gombrowicz. This is a series of columns written between November 1959 and October in 1961. In one

**290** Idem, letter to Maurice Nadeau of August 1, 1961, in: R. Gombrowicz, *Gombrowicz w Europie*, p. 112.

**291** See W. Gombrowicz, *Fragment z dziennika*, “Kultura”, listopad 1961, no. 11 (169), p. 16–26.

**292** A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowq z Wilczej*, p. 157.

**293** W. Gombrowicz, *Walka o sławę*, p. 247.

**294** Idem, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 656.

**295** A. Fiut, *Pojedynek o doktorowq z Wilczej*, p. 157.

**296** W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik 1953–1968*, p. 658.

of them, from February 1961, Gombrowicz described in detail his acquaintance with Schulz. This is one of the important testimonies of their parallel biographies, subject to much less literary mystification than “Fragment z dziennika”, which was published several months later.

Since then, several dozen biographical articles and pieces of literary criticism have been written comparing the prose of Gombrowicz and Schulz. These include texts by Artur Sandauer<sup>297</sup>, Jerzy Jarzębski<sup>298</sup>, Włodzimierz Bolecki<sup>299</sup> and many young researchers. The number of such works is constantly growing.

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**297** A. Sandauer, *Schulz i Gombrowicz, czyli literatura głębin. (Próba psychoanalizy)*, “Kultura” 1976, no. 44, p. 5; no. 45, p. 4.

**298** J. Jarzębski, *Awangarda wobec historii: Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz*, “Odra” 1987, no. 11, p. 23–30; idem, “Między awangardą a modernizmem: Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz”, in: idem, *W Polsce, czyli wszędzie. Szkice o polskiej prozie współczesnej*, Warszawa 1992, p. 7–18; idem, *Bóg ateistów: Schulz, Gombrowicz, Lem*, “Znak” 1997, no. 2, p. 17–33.

**299** W. Bolecki, *Witkacy, Schulz, Gombrowicz*, “Dialog” 1995, no. 10, p. 88–99.