

# Katarzyna Warska: Childhood in the Biography of a Writer. The Case of Bruno Schulz

The traditional model of a comprehensive biography of a writer assumes that the author will attempt to tell story of the life of the “protagonist” from birth to death – usually through a reconstruction of family history, and sometimes also with the posthumous history of the body, or with some detail on acts of remembrance<sup>1</sup>. In this model, the biographer tries to reveal to the reader all phases of the protagonist’s life. The selective model, in turn, represented by all kinds of thematic biographies, provides a selection of events concentrating on a particular aspect of human existence, or focuses on a given phase of the protagonist’s life. Both models may present a chronological variant or a different order of presentation of events, for example from the perspective of a key moment in life that is told at the beginning, or in a thematic order, organising facts by places or people, for example.

Books such as *Regiony wielkiej herezji* [Regions of Great Heresy] by Jerzy Ficowski, *Schulz pod kluczem* [Schulz under Lock and Key] by Wiesław Budzyński, *Bruno. Epoka genialna* [Bruno. Age of a Genius] by Anna Kaszuba-Dębska, and two texts by Jerzy Jarzębski (that in some sense also belonging to the biographical genre) – *Schulz*, a part of the series “A to Polska właśnie” [“And Here You See Poland”], and the preface to a publication in the “Biblioteka Narodowa” [“National Library”] series – are intended to be comprehensive<sup>2</sup>. Their goal is to cover everything that was known at that point (Ficowski, Jarzębski, Kaszuba-Dębska) or to supplement what was already known with newly established facts (Budzyński), which came from all stages and areas of life, and therefore were not subject to thematic selection. Jarzębski explains how difficult the task was: “Bruno Schulz was not the type of writer who could easily become a subject of

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1 The continuity between biography and necrography is confirmed by the words of Janusz Sławiński: “The death of an outstanding person (we know this from Gundolf) is by no means the end of his biography”, (J. Sławiński, *Czas wspomnień*, in: *Wspomnienia o Julianie Przybosiu*, ed. and prefaced by J. Sławiński, Warszawa 1976, p. 7).

2 See J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, Sejny 2002; W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, Warszawa 2001; A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, Kraków 2020; J. Jarzębski, *Wstęp*, in: B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, ed. J. Jarzębski, second edition revised and supplemented, Wrocław 1998 (BN I 264); idem, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999.

a biography based on the ‘life and work’ model. What we know about his life does not lend itself to a romantic plot. [...] The biography of Schulz is truly not a topic for a longer narrative”<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, Jarzębski appreciates Ficowski’s efforts: “For a reader born near the end of this century, it is sometimes difficult to understand why the biography of Schulz required such painstaking reconstruction, to which Jerzy Ficowski, a pre-eminent expert on Schulz’s issues, devoted his life. In fact, these studies were so difficult because the writer’s natural environment, i.e. the environment of Galician Jews, was almost entirely wiped out by the war”<sup>4</sup>.

At first glance, the selective biography model seems less challenging. However, this is contradicted by two thematic biographies of Andrzejewski written by Anna Synoradzka-Demadre: *Andrzejewski* and *Jerzy Andrzejewski. Przyczynek do biografii prywatnej* [Jerzy Andrzejewski. A Contribution to a Private Biography]<sup>5</sup>. They can hardly be called modest, and undoubtedly titanic effort was put into them. Kaszuba-Dębska started from the selective model, and first published *Kobiety i Schulz* [Women and Schulz]<sup>6</sup>. This *her-story* is also largely about Schulz, but his life is presented from the perspective of his relationships with women (which Jarzębski had previously dealt with in a chapter on “Women” in his popular *Schulz*). A similar path was taken by Klementyna Suchanow, who first wrote *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza* [The Argentine Adventures of Gombrowicz], and then a comprehensive biography entitled *Gombrowicz. Ja, geniusz* [Gombrowicz. I, Genius]<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, Budzyński moved from the general to the specific. His *Uczniowie Schulza* [Schulz’s Students], in which he looks at the writer’s fate through the prism of the accounts of his former pupils, could belong to the selective model. Incidentally, like Kaszuba-Dębska, Budzyński tells a different story – of the students who are his interlocutors, and of other inhabitants of Drohobych who are in one way or another woven into the extensive network of relations with Schulz<sup>8</sup>. Budzyński moves even further away from Schulz in his earlier work *Miasto Schulza* [Schulz’s Town]<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> A. Synoradzka-Demadre, *Andrzejewski*, Kraków 1997; eadem, *Jerzy Andrzejewski. Przyczynek do biografii prywatnej*, Warszawa 2016.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, Gdańsk 2016.

<sup>7</sup> K. Suchanow, *Argentyńskie przygody Gombrowicza*, Kraków 2005; eadem, *Gombrowicz. Ja, Geniusz*, vol. 1, Wołowiec 2017.

<sup>8</sup> W. Budzyński, *Uczniowie Schulza*, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Miasto Schulza*, Warszawa 2005.

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Regardless of the choice of a model for the biography of Schulz, there are basically two motivations behind the attempt to write it. The first one is to show a “truth” about the protagonist, his life and his environment. The existence of this motivation is confirmed by numerous self-referential fragments in biographies. For example, Kaszuba-Dębska in the preface to *Bruno. Epoka genialna* declares: “Let me present the biography of Bruno Schulz: an outstanding artist, guiding me on my creative path from an early age, and in a way still influencing my perception of reality with words and imagination. My intention is to tell, to the extent allowed by the current sources, the true story”<sup>10</sup>.

In the era of postmodernity, we know perfectly well that this goal, defined as capturing the essence of what actually happened in the past, is completely unattainable. There is a whole list of reasons for such a state of interpretive affairs, but I will limit myself to three areas here that are important for the humanities. (1) We know that representation itself is contaminated with powerlessness. It does not refer to anything outside itself, and by its very nature it assumes the absence of what it is supposed to represent<sup>11</sup>. (2) No objective vision of history is cognitively available, which results from the nature of the past being only a construct (history is written by the victors; and it consists of facts, not events, etc.)<sup>12</sup>. All that remains after the protagonist of the biography is branded with creation, chance, and the impermanence of memory. (3) A biographer is so entangled in language that the biography hardly differs from a novel. That is why White wrote: “[History] is always written as part of a contest between contending poetic figurations of what the past *might* consist of”<sup>13</sup>. A reference to poetry would be perhaps even more appropriate than a reference to the novel because a biographer uses words to construct their own version of the story about the protagonist, writing as much about the originally intended subject, as about themselves – since it is impossible to avoid elements of autobiography in a biography. Stanisław Rosiek describes it as a banal truth (writing this time not about the study of Schulz, but of Mickiewicz) “that studying someone’s

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**10** A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, Kraków 2020, p. 9. In an interview conducted by Polina Justova, Kaszuba-Dębska explains the reasons why she decided to write a biography: “But above all, I lacked a comprehensive biography the dominant feature of which would be the truth, perhaps painful, but the truth, not a mythical poetic story” ([https:// culture.pl/pl/artykul/anna-kaszuba-debska-schulz-czytany-na-nowo-wywiad-0](https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/anna-kaszuba-debska-schulz-czytany-na-nowo-wywiad-0); retrieved: 24 January 2021).

**11** See M. P. Markowski, *Pragnienie obecności. Filozofie reprezentacji od Platona do Kartezjusza*, Gdańsk 1999; idem, *O reprezentacji*, in: *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy badawcze*, eds. M. P. Markowski, R. Nycz, second edition, Kraków 2012, p. 287–333.

**12** See H. White, “The Historical Event”, in: *differences* (2008) 19 (2): 9–34.

**13** H. White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press 1978, p. 98.

biography – especially a great biography – is rarely impartial, that a biographer brings in themselves, their horizons, and their morals. And this becomes a basis for the creation of an image of the protagonist<sup>14</sup>. There is no biography that would not manifest features of another genre, or would not bear the marks of a related literary convention. This is perhaps why White – developing Northrop Frye’s model – determined four narrative patterns of historical writing: Tragedy, Comedy, Satire, and Romance<sup>15</sup>. When Schulzologists analyse the biography of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops*, they are looking for more detailed answers. For example, Jakub Orzeszek notices in Ficowski’s works the effect of mourning after the deceased Schulz<sup>16</sup>. Researched in this way, *Regiony wielkiej herezji* is as much a biography as an elegy. Jerzy Kandziora remembers – in the context of Ficowski – to “recall the tradition of great realist novel, of which the author of *Regiony wielkiej herezji* was an admirer”<sup>17</sup>. Marcin Romanowski, on the other hand, considers Budzyński’s *Schulz pod kluczem* as a reportage biography that puts memory above history<sup>18</sup>.

However, it seems that there is some – if only a very thin – thread connecting “real” events with the biographer’s story – even though it is only their good will. Philippe Lejeune assures: “Without a doubt, the truth is unattainable, especially when it concerns human life, but the desire to acquire it determines the field of discourse and cognitive acts, a certain type of human relations, by no means illusory ones”<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, a biographer’s role is to fulfil the need, expressed by Paul Ricœur, to present a narrative. Even though the truth still eludes the narrator, an ethically non-indifferent narrative remains an important tool (or rather act) that could help us get to know our different selves and the selves of another person – the oneself as another<sup>20</sup>. Hanna Kirchner, for example, tries to follow this non-essential path: “Does this distance allow me to reach the ‘real’ Nałkowska, stripped of masks and costumes, stripped of the veils of self-delusion? The assumption is incorrect. The writer’s life course and the record of her inner experience confirm the knowledge about human that she developed in her work, and it also applies to this her. This is what I am trying to make visible in this

14 S. Rosiek, *Mickiewicz (po śmierci). Studia i szkice nekrograficzne*, Gdańsk 2013, p. 10.

15 H. White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press 1978, p. 81–100.

16 J. Orzeszek, *Schulz i żałoba. O drugim ciele pisarza*, “Schulz/Forum” no. 14, 2019, p. 168–185.

17 J. Kandziora, *Jerzy Ficowski o Schulzu – między rekonstrukcją a retoryką. (Refleksje nad “Regionami wielkiej herezji”)*, “Schulz/Forum” no. 3, 2013, p. 58.

18 M. Romanowski, *Biografia reportażowa w epoce upamiętnienia. O “Schulzu pod kluczem” Wiesława Budzyńskiego*, “Jednak Książki. Gdańskie czasopismo humanistyczne” 2016, no. 5, p. 42.

19 P. Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact”, translated by K. Leary, in: *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis 1989, p. 3.

20 P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London 1992, esp. “Sixth Study. The Self and Narrative Identity”.

book – that a human is ‘real’ in all their even most contradictory elements. It is not without reason that Günter Grass used the metaphor of peeling an onion in his autobiography. For it is only a unity of layers, down to the last scale”<sup>21</sup>.

Let us therefore assume that value lies in the very attempt to reach the truth, and also – thus agreeing with Frank Ankersmit – that, after all, there were some events that, despite the knowledge of the inevitability of one’s defeat, the scholar of the past and the author of a biography, constantly and persistently strives to learn about<sup>22</sup>. Thus, what really happened cannot be called “the truth” in a biography. It will be the truth of the image, as in Ankersmit’s metaphor, in which the historian is an artist who renders the general atmosphere of the scene<sup>23</sup>.

Adopting even a weak, Ankersmitian definition of truth does not seem to release the biographer from certain obligations towards the protagonist, or at least – as I stated above – the biographers themselves can feel this burden on their shoulders. Representation, even if it substitutes for the original, strives to match it<sup>24</sup>. The decisions of a biographer regarding the selection of material and the methods of its presentation are not without moral consequences. As Ricœur aphoristically put it, there is “no ethically neutral narrative”<sup>25</sup>. In the case of biographies, ethical complications have an additional dimension. A biographer signs a moral pact – let us call it, in accordance with standard parlance, a “biographical pact” that protects the reader who believes in the story and accepts the rules imposed by the author and the text. Without this agreement, the recipient would be doomed to fail from the start<sup>26</sup>.

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We have analysed the qualitative aspect of the relationship between life and biography, so we can now discuss the quantitative relationship. Birth and death mark the beginning and end of the timeline on which one can mark a countable and tangible number of points (events) and ranges (periods, phases of life). By virtue of the obligation to the protagonist and the reader, the events marked on this axis appeal to the biographer in an indefinite way to be represented in the story. What happened should simply be told. The plan of the story and the plan

**21** H. Kirchner, *Nalkowska albo życie pisane*, second edition, Warszawa 2011, p. 9. Underlined – HK

**22** See F. Ankersmit, “Six These on Narrativist Philosophy of History”, in: *History and Topology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1994.

**23** F. Ankersmit, “The Linguistic Turn: Literary Theory and Historical Theory”, in: *Historical Representation*, p. 29–74.

**24** See F. Ankersmit, “In Praise of Subjectivity”, in: *Historical Representation* 2001, no. 2 (3), p. 21.

**25** P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London 1992, p. 115.

**26** The term “biographical pact”, often used in biographical research, was, of course, coined as an analogy to Philippe Lejeune’s “autobiographical pact”.

of the life should coincide. Naturally, this obligation cannot be fulfilled either – it is technically impossible, but also strategically unnecessary. Not everything is of interest to us (biographers and readers). In this sense, any comprehensive biography has a selective dimension, is a part, a fragment, an episode. Michał Paweł Markowski wrote on this subject for “Tygodnik Powszechny”: “As a narrative about life, biography is an art of exclusion, choice, and omission”<sup>27</sup>.

A biographer deliberately focuses the reader’s attention on various events. First, they select the ones they intend to recount, and then arrange the events in the appropriate order in the course of the narrative. For example, Kaszuba-Dębska starts *Bruno. Epoka genialna* with an attempt to reconstruct Schulz’s departure to Paris. Budzyński returns to Schulz’s death, and Jarzębski to his birth<sup>28</sup>. The biographer describes in detail only those events that they find special for some reason. This was already desired by the American historian Paul Murray Kendall, whose words are reported by Anita Całek as follows: “The author [of a biography] should allocate more space to specific events, depending not on the amount of material they have but on the importance of a specific fact in the life of the portrayed character”<sup>29</sup>.

When selecting important events, the author can follow intuition, believe the confession of the protagonist who considered an event important for their life, or rely on a tradition in research on a given protagonist, as well as follow the hierarchy of their times and/or the current conventions for writing biographies. Sylwia Chwedorczyk follows the contemporary, ethically motivated need to reveal the previously tabooed homosexual relationship between Anna Kowalska and Maria Dąbrowska (which, incidentally, recreates Dąbrowska’s domination over Kowalska in the narrative of her biography; fortunately, she looks at the poet’s life through the prism of another woman, but if she were to publish the book as a biography devoted to a woman’s relationship with a more influential man, she would probably be exposed to liberal criticism)<sup>30</sup>. Artur Domosławski was sued by Ryszard Kapuściński’s heirs after he had presented events from the reporter’s life, posing questions about the boundaries between private and public, ethical and unethical (which, by the way, probably turned out to be the founding act of modern Polish biography studies)<sup>31</sup>. The biographer’s motivations may be completely individual, as it was in the case of Synoradzka who included a chapter

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**27** M. P. Markowski, *Cień biografą. Życie odkrywane*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 2010, no. 17, sup., online: <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/cien-biografy-145068> (retrieved: 24 January 2021).

**28** W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, chapters “Krwawy czwartek” and “Zawiadowca gabinetu ry-sunkowego”; J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, p. 7 and 28.

**29** A. Całek, *Biografia naukowa: od koncepcji do narracji. Interdyscyplinarność, teorie, metody badaw-cze*, Kraków 2013, p. 30.

**30** S. Chwedorczyk, *Kowalska. Ta od Dąbrowskiej*, Warszawa 2020.

**31** A. Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warszawa 2010.

in Andrzejewski's private biography which broke down its structure, in order to correct her mistake from the previous book<sup>32</sup>. Traditionally, in biographies of Schulz, his death seems to play the most important role: it is a foundational event for *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, a point of departure in *Schulz pod kluczem*, an object of continuous rewriting in *Bruno. Epoka genialna*, an explanation to the preface to the edition in "Biblioteka Narodowa", and perhaps only in the series "A to Polska właśnie" Schulz's death is treated as any other event – and in a manner consistent with the popular science convention of the series which presents rather plain biographies of writers.

Despite Kendall's advice, biographers, proud of their discoveries, often stretch and fill certain parts of the story material with further detail when they have managed to gather a lot of information on a given topic. At that moment, an event is given extra value, and then becomes even deeply entrenched in tradition, though as if by accident. In the case of Schulz, the relationships with people whose letters survived the war are well described: with Debora Vogel, Józefina Szelińska, Romana Halpern, and Anna Płockier. I am not trying to undermine these person's role in Schulz's life. But what about those we know nothing about, or know very little – like the mysterious Stefania Dretler-Flin? Kaszuba-Dębska says nothing about her, but instead she cites Schulz's complaints about the unruliness of the school-age youth in Drohobych<sup>33</sup>.

A biographer may also shorten their presentation of a topic if they consider it boring or irrelevant to the reader, or they might even omit some known events or their entire sequences in their narrative. In such a case, a biographer knows that something happened to the protagonist, but they deliberately hide it from the reader – probably in the name of the same truth for which another event is described in detail. Their choices may be individual, but certain topics are sometimes omitted or only mentioned for cultural or strictly ideological reasons, analogically to the representation and over-representation of other topics. Rosiek – drawing up the project of the calendar of Schulz's life – used the metaphor of exile: "Choice is a right (often used incorrectly) and a privilege (often overused) of a biographer, who creates discourse in accordance with their own principles, including within its framework only some of the events known to them, at the same time condemning other ones to exile: to marginalization or oblivion"<sup>34</sup>. Marcin Romanowski commented on Ficowski's work: "Considering the problem of the (non-)presence of the erotic sphere in biography, we should, of course, take into account the cultural context in which the biographical narrative is written, as well as the context of the testimonies on which the biographer

**32** See A. Synoradzka-Demadre, *Jerzy Andrzejewski*, p. 13.

**33** A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno*, p. 135–137.

**34** S. Rosiek, *Biografia Schulza jako wyzwanie (rzucone historii)*, "Schulz/Forum" 6, 2015, p. 75.

bases their work. This cultural context shapes the framework for what can be said about the protagonist's sexuality. What might seem excessively restrained from our perspective in the second decade of the 21st century, was simply a matter of *decorum* at the time when *Regiony* was being written (the 1960s)<sup>35</sup>. When I am reading *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, I do not have the feeling that Ficowski ignored Schulz's masochism. We simply know today that he did not write about everything the witnesses told him. And naturally, for Ficowski, Schulz's masochism was an artistic strategy rather than a biographical fact. But Schulz the masochist did share the posthumous fate of homosexual writers whose sexuality remained silent for decades.

The reason for certain events being underrepresented or omitted in a biography is often the insufficient amount of material or lack of knowledge about a given topic. In such a case, a biographer can only mention some facts or hypothesize, consciously remain silent on a topic so as not to mislead the reader, or simply might not be aware of an event at all. In the case of Schulz – as Ficowski so movingly put it – the archive is modest and poses many difficulties for biographers: “The war, the change of the country's borders, the death of most of Schulz's closest friends, the destruction of his copious correspondence, the disappearance of all his autographs and manuscripts – all this made it necessary to act almost blindly, often with detective-like or even archaeological methods. That is how exactly the time of his biography and its close witnesses was wasted”<sup>36</sup>. At any rate, none of the biographers so far knew about Schulz's actual debut, which was a short story *Undula*, published under the pseudonym Marcelli Weron in the oilmen's magazine “Świt”<sup>37</sup>. Kaszuba-Dębska managed to mention this fact in the preface, but only when the rest of the book was ready<sup>38</sup>. Only since the digitalization of birth records, it has been known that Schulz's parents did not have just three children who lived into adulthood. Often biographers are forced to report events about which little is known – which also applies to the biographers of Schulz. Even though he studied in a boys' folk school for the first four years of his education, both Ficowski and Jarzębski write only about his middle school period. Budzyński quotes a student who mentioned that he went to the same school as Schulz. Only Kaszuba-Dębska discusses the topic of folk school, but she does not have any materials to provide further detail<sup>39</sup>.

**35** See M. Romanowski, *Masochizm Schulza w ujęciu Ficowskiego*, “Schulz/Forum” 7, 2016, p. 100–101.

**36** J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 14.

**37** See Ł. Chomycz, *Wokół wystawy w Borystawiu. O dwóch debiutach Brunona Schulza*, translated by A. Pomorski, “Schulz/Forum” 14, 2019, p. 13–32.

**38** A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Bruno*, p. 12–13.

**39** *Ibidem*, p. 133–137. Cf. K. Warska, *1898–1902*, <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/1898-1902> (retrieved: 12 January 2020).



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“Let us take as an example a complete life-story of the kind frequently written in the nineteenth century. The fabula contains the birth of the hero, his childhood, adolescence, military service, first love, the period of social ambition, decline, and death. It is possible to determine the number of pages devoted to each episode. Often, this simple exercise alone will make clear that certain episodes are given more attention than others. Childhood, for instance, is often summarized quickly, while ‘first love’ is dwelt upon in much more detail” – this is how Mieke Bal writes about the temporal relations between the phases of the protagonist’s life in the 19th century novel<sup>40</sup>. We can often observe a similar arrangement in biographies of writers. Childhood is subject to all the mechanisms of shortening and omission known from the novel. Anna Arno admits: “For a biographer, the first twenty years of the protagonist’s life are actually one chapter, there is a lot of speculation, the history of the city they came from, the history of the family. But the twenty years between forty and sixty, or between sixty and eighty – that is a huge work”<sup>41</sup>.

An approach to the topic of childhood in biography could be traced over time – just as Philippe Ariès did that at the general level of Western culture. There is no doubt that cultural clichés are reflected in biographies. Up to a certain point, childhood seems to be useful in a writer’s biography only when the biographer discovers some formative events in it. If the routine of an adult writer’s life is of little interest to anyone, what can one say about the everyday life of a child? Who will treat playing hide-and-seek with childhood friends as seriously as exchanging correspondence with another eminent writer? This conviction about the scarce importance of events from the first dozen or so years of life also translates into a general lack of materials for writing a biography. Not much of this period is preserved and there is little that can be reconstructed from actual sources.

However, when analysing biographies synchronously, differences can be observed depending on the biographical convention adopted by the author. Childhood is rather briefly discussed in ‘life and work’ monographs, such as the prefaces to editions in “Biblioteka Narodowa”. Michał Głowiński, in his preface to Tuwim’s *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected Poems], omits his childhood entirely<sup>42</sup>. Andrzej Zawada devotes six paragraphs to Iwaszkiewicz’s childhood – less than

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<sup>40</sup> M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, third edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> *Biografia. O atrakcyjności gatunku i jego pułapkach* [Biography. Its appeal and traps], the discussion was attended by: A. Arno, A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, G. Kubica-Heller, M. Szumna, M. Urbanowski, T. Walas i M. Wyka, moderated by A. Pekaniec, “Dekada Literacka” 2018, nr 2/3 (36/37), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> M. Głowiński, *Wstęp*, in: J. Tuwim, *Wiersze wybrane*, ed. M. Głowiński, fourth edition, extended, Wrocław 1986.

three pages out of the 21 of the entire biographical segment<sup>43</sup>. Three paragraphs about Leśmian's childhood can be found in the study by Jacek Trznadel<sup>44</sup>. Ewa Wiegandtowa devotes six paragraphs on two pages to Wittlin's childhood in relation to the 42 pages of the whole work which covers both his life and work.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, it takes Mirosław Wójcik six paragraphs – two pages compared to the 41 pages of the story on Zegadłowicz's entire life – to talk about his childhood<sup>46</sup>. Those six paragraphs seem to be the average volume of childhood stories in the introductions to publications in "Biblioteka Narodowa". This size is exceeded by notes about writers whose fathers were writers. In the preface to *Pożegnanie jesieni* [Farewell to Autumn] Włodzimierz Bolecki wrote about Witkacy's childhood on fourteen paragraphs – almost six pages, with one page devoted to the story of his baptism – out of 31 pages of "Biographical Information"<sup>47</sup>. Jan Błoński, on the other hand, devoted eleven paragraphs to Witkacy's childhood, which occupy four and a half pages out of 26 pages of his entire biography<sup>48</sup>. In the preface to *Boundary* [Granica] Włodzimierz Wójcik would question the thesis about the marginalisation of childhood in the prefaces from "Biblioteka Narodowa" with 11 paragraphs about the first dozen or so years of Nałkowska's life, out of 18 paragraphs of her entire story, but by titling this part of his text "Family Environment", he actually confirms the rule. Still, though, in the part devoted to literature, Włodzimierz Wójcik's preface includes Nałkowska's youthful readings and her literary debut at the age of 14<sup>49</sup>. In Wiegandt's preface to *Romans Teresy Hennert* [Teresa Hennert's Romance] we meet Nałkowska, a teenage girl, the author and protagonist of *Dzienniki* [Diaries], a schoolgirl and a novice writer. The topic of this story, which consists of 25 paragraphs, can hardly be called childhood; rather, it is focused on early maturity, Nałkowska's family and social circumstances<sup>50</sup>.

Twenty-first century total biographies set a different standard. For example, Radosław Romaniuk in the biography of Iwaszkiewicz extensively analyses his family relationships, the atmosphere of his childhood, contact with culture and art, education, entertainment, upbringing and socialization, travels, father's death, moving to Warsaw, Elizavetgrad and Kiev with all their consequences, the first

43 A. Zawada, *Wstęp*, in: J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Opowiadania wybrane*, ed. A. Zawada, Wrocław 2001, p. V–XXI.

44 J. Trznadel, *Wstęp*, in: B. Leśmian, *Poezje wybrane*, ed. J. Trznadel, first edition, electronic, based on third edition, extended (1991), Wrocław 2019, epub.

45 E. Wiegandtowa, *Wstęp*, in: J. Wittlin, *Sól ziemi*, ed. E. Wiegandtowa, Wrocław 1991, p. VI–XLII.

46 M. Wójcik, *Wstęp*, in: E. Zegadłowicz, *Zmory. Kronika z zamierchłej przeszłości*, ed. M. Wójcik, Wrocław 2006, p. VII–XLVIII.

47 W. Bolecki, *Wstęp*, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Pożegnanie jesieni*, prefaced and ed. by W. Bolecki, Wrocław 2017, p. V–XI.

48 J. Błoński, *Wstęp*, in: S. I. Witkiewicz, *Wybór dramatów*, selected and prefaced by J. Błoński, text and notes by M. Kwaśny, second edition, corrected, Wrocław 1983, p. V–XXIX.

49 W. Wójcik, *Wstęp*, in: Z. Nałkowska, *Granica*, ed. W. Wójcik, Wrocław 1971, p. III–XIV.

50 E. Wiegandt, *Wstęp*, in: Z. Nałkowska, *Romans Teresy Hennert*, Wrocław 2001, p. V–XIV.

glimpses of literary talent, tutoring slightly younger students, relationships with peers, emerging (homo)eroticism and existential dramas<sup>51</sup>. In a similar manner, Suchanow outlines the background of Gombrowicz's adolescence even more broadly and in even greater detail<sup>52</sup>.

At the same time, childhood can be considered the most important period in a human life. This is what psychoanalysis has been saying since its inception. Let us quote, for example, the words of Sigmund Freud, from the unfinished *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*: "Analytical experience has convinced us that the assertion we hear so often – that the child is, psychologically speaking, the father of the man, and that the experiences of his early years are of unsurpassable significance for his entire later life – is totally correct"<sup>53</sup>. Suchanow follows this path when analysing Gombrowicz's relationship with his mother. Today, childhood is also important for non-psychoanalytic branches of developmental psychology, which is becoming increasingly popular among a wide range of people, especially parents. We know this for sure: our functioning as adults depends on our childhood experiences.

Children studies values childhood for ethical reasons. Karolina Szymborska in "Teksty drugie" reports on the ambitions of this integrated, interdisciplinary field of research: she sees it as another movement demanding the empowerment of the excluded. Researchers focusing on children studies recognize that our culture is adult-centric and it is high time to pay attention to children and childhood<sup>54</sup>. And even if it is not an area that directly influences biographical studies, it still grows out of a postmodern way of understanding human, the echo of which has been reverberating in the field of biographies for over a dozen years. Childhood is a construct that, similarly to later phases of life, is affected by gender, ethnicity, and social class. It is also a period of socialisation, when we interiorise the rules around us. From a cultural perspective, one can see many factors shaping the image of the world that is reflected in the literary work. But to recognise a child's experience as a legitimate attempt to see experience in childhood. At this point it is hard not to appeal to the common diagnosis: childhood is important to us. It is constant surprise, innocence, and freedom. It is strong emotions, which Chwedorzuk, for example, focuses on, probably due to the fact she based on Kowalska's diary<sup>55</sup>. Childhood is about relationships with family,

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51 R. Romaniuk, *Inne życie. Biografia Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2012, chapter "Domy i ludzie", "Wyspa Tymoszwówka", "Stracone pokolenie", "Strona Byszew".

52 K. Suchanow, *Gombrowicz*, op.cit., chapter "Małoszyce", "Stużewska 3".

53 S. Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby, London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 215.

54 K. Szymborska, *Children studies jako perspektywa metodologiczna. Współczesne tendencje w badaniach nad dzieckiem*, "Teksty Drugie" 2016, no. 1, p. 189–205.

55 S. Chwedorzuk, *Kowalska*, op.cit., chapter "Głód czułości".

peers, authorities, and sometimes also perpetrators. It is also school with its curriculum, space, and procedures. For example, Kirchner clearly paints a portrait of young Nałkowska as an above-average talented rebel<sup>56</sup>. Her biography touches upon the first books and encounters with culture. Places where we return with sentiment and which we can dream about for the rest of our lives. Suchanow follows this path, implementing Rybicka's theory about (auto)bio/geo/graphy<sup>57</sup>.

For all these reasons, shortening or omitting childhood in a biography seems to impoverish the reader's view of the protagonist and undermines this – even suspicious – internal and historical truth.

■

In the case of the biography of Schulz, we are forced to look at his childhood, for example, by an alleged dream about castration from the age of seven, recounted to Stefan Szuman in a letter dated 24 July 1932<sup>58</sup>. Many literary scholars interpreted Schulz's art through the prism of this dream, which should be considered important regardless of whether Schulz actually had such a dream or it was invented for the purposes of self-identification<sup>59</sup>. Schulz described his childhood in prose, and he did it so evocatively that it actually became synonymous with childhood as a literary topic. This is supported by the topics discussed in lessons of the Polish literature, and in the high school exam, which are popular indicators that a writer belongs to the canon. The autobiographical nature of Schulz's stories is so obvious that in their interpretation it is difficult not to refer to the writer's biography. Naturally this does not mean that we should naively consider stories as a source of biographical knowledge, which Kaszuba-Dębska tends to do. However, Jarzębski's words from the introduction to *The Cinnamon Shops*, published as part of *Collected Works* remain valid: "It is quite obvious that Schulz identifies with his protagonist, Józef. But this identification has a special character, because – as the protagonist – Schulz somehow projects himself at various moments in life: he is a child, a youngster, and even an old man standing over

**56** H. Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane*, op.cit., chapter "Kwiat rodu".

**57** See E. Rybicka, *Auto/bio/geo/grafie*, "Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze" 2003, no. 4, p. 7–23.

**58** B. Schulz, Letter to Stefan Szuman dated 24 July 1932, in: idem, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 5: *Księga listów*, collected and prepared for printing by J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 36.

**59** See e.g., M. P. Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązość. Schulz, egzystencja, literatura*, Kraków 2012, p. 79; W. Owczarski, *Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora*, Gdańsk 2006; T. Olchanowski, *Jungowska interpretacja mitu ojca w prozie Brunona Schulza*, Białystok 2001, p. 73–76; M. Zaleski, *Masochista na Cyterze*, "Teksty Drugie" 2005, no. 3, p. 184–203; S. Rosiek, *Odcięcie. Siedem fragmentów*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 25–64; F. Szałasek, *Erros Schulza*, "Schulz/Forum" 7, 2016, p. 75–90.

the grave. Therefore, he reviews his life, viewing it from different perspectives and trying to give it different meanings”<sup>60</sup>.

That’s why Ficowski wrote a lot about childhood in *Regiony wielkiej herezji*, which – analysed in their latest version in *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice* – include eleven pages of text with illustrations on biography, and another ten on creativity – a repeated childhood<sup>61</sup>. Around the time when Ficowski first published *Regiony* (1967), other ‘life and work’ monographs were also published: *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość* [Zygmunt Krasiński – Debut and Maturity] (1962) by Maria Janion; *Orzeszkowa* (1965) by Maria Żmigrodzka; *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski* (1967) by Wincenty Danek, or *Teofil Lenartowicz i jego poezje* [Teofil Lenartowicz and his poems] (1970) by Jan Nowakowski<sup>62</sup>. Ficowski begins chronologically, from the birth of Schulz. He talks about Drohobych at the time, family, Jews, relationships with parents and peers, school, first manifestations of artistic and literary talent, physical and mental characteristics. This stage of his protagonist’s life goes as far as university studies and World War I. In his view of childhood, Ficowski wants to follow Schulz: “The most spiritually active attitude to the surrounding reality is provided by childhood: each perception, every experience is accompanied by an act of creative imagination, etiological myths are born at every step. This is the primordial beginning, the creation of the world, repeated at the beginning of each individual biography. Reality tasted for the first time, not systematised by experience, unencumbered by any knowledge about its rules and structure, submits to new associations, takes on the shapes proposed to it, comes to life fertilized by a dynamising vision. It is right there, in this myth-creating sphere, that the origin and finish line of Bruno Schulz’s work and his artistic program can be found”<sup>63</sup>.

Wiesław Budzyński in *Schulz pod kluczem*, jumping from topic to topic, mentions Schulz’s childhood only occasionally. In his work, Schulz is already an adult, not to say – already dead. Naturally, there is a simple explanation of this absence of childhood: the topic had been addressed by Ficowski by that time. Moreover, Budzyński’s interviewees, who were the source of his narrative, were not particularly familiar with the matter.

In his preface to the edition by “Biblioteka Narodowa”, Jarzębski writes that Schulz’s childhood is, as a phase of life, proportional to other phases. It covers

60 J. Jarzębski, *Sklepy bławatne i sklepy cynamonowe*, in: B. Schulz, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 2: *Sklepy cynamonowe*, prefaced and edited by J. Jarzębski, critical supplement S. Rosiek, linguistic ed. M. Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2019, p. 23.

61 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 17–28, 29–38.

62 M. Janion, *Zygmunt Krasiński – debiut i dojrzałość*, Warszawa 1962; M. Żmigrodzka, *Orzeszkowa. Młodość pozytywizmu*, Warszawa 1965; W. Danek, *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski. Żywoć i dzieła*, Kraków 1967; J. Nowakowski, *Teofil Lenartowicz i jego poezje*, Kraków 1970.

63 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 29.



Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square III**, ca. 1936, pencil, ink, 16.5 × 20.3 cm, Museum Literature in Warsaw

Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square I**, ca. 1935, pencil, 20.5 × 16.5 cm, Museum of Literature in Warsaw

Bruno Schulz, **Boys in the Hall at the Market Square II** – illustration to “Spring” included in the Sanatorium under the Hourglass, before 1937, ink, lost drawing





Bruno Schulz, **Pensioner and Boys on a Bench**,  
before 1937, pencil, 11.2 × 10.6 cm, Museum  
Literature in Warsaw



five paragraphs (two pages), compared to thirteen and a half pages of the entire biographical part. The story about Drohobych at that time serves as the account of the first years of life. Then comes the period of school: Schulz reveals talent, suffers alienation, and shows a predilection for masochism. After a relatively calm time, a difficult family situation occurs. Later, Schulz goes to university<sup>64</sup>. In *Schulz* from the series “A to Polska właśnie”, his childhood looks similar, though the entire book is much more extensive than the preface to *Opowiadania*. The main information is about his good academic results<sup>65</sup>.

Kaszuba-Dębska in *Kobiety i Schulz* portrays Schulz's mother and also briefly mentions his childhood<sup>66</sup>. In *Epoka genialna* she tries to recreate his childhood, but clearly lacks sources. In Schulz's folk school discussed by this author, there is poverty and mischief. Then Schulz writes exams and gets a dog (though this information must have come from the literary biography). He goes to middle school – it seems to be a great time for him: he has great results, good relationships with friends, and he can pursue his great passion – drawing<sup>67</sup>.

It has been 54 years since *Regiony wielkiej herezji* was first published. Since then, there has been no revolution in the biographical view of Schulz's childhood. In terms of the importance of this topic, it still remains – as Rosiek would put it – a challenge for schulzology<sup>68</sup>. Only Kaszuba-Dębska has tried to change this state, rather unsuccessfully. Naturally, the question remains whether such success is to be achieved at all, even in the perspective of everything I mentioned above. Another approach to the comprehensive Schulz's biography can hardly be expected now. However, the calendar of the life, work and reception of Bruno Schulz is being created, governed solely by the order of time, and “is intended to establish the text of Schulz's life”<sup>69</sup>. Next, it should be used by biographers as a starting point for their research.

■

It is important to mention here, perhaps a bit late, the second possible motive of Schulz's biographers. It is the desire to tell something important about all of us: about ourselves, about the reader, not only about the past, but also about the present. Biography can reveal this – even partial – truth, because – as Michał Paweł Markowski wrote – it is “a moral genre, not because it follows moral rules,

64 J. Jarzębski, *Wstęp*, p. IX–X.

65 Idem, *Schulz*, p. 29–31.

66 A. Kaszuba-Dębska, *Kobiety i Schulz*, p. 313–314.

67 Eadem, *Bruno*, p. 150.

68 See S. Rosiek, *Biografia Schulza jako wyzwanie (rzucone historii)*, p. 71–81.

69 Ibidem, p. 74.

but because it allows us to better understand other people. And therefore understand ourselves”<sup>70</sup>. It is probably thanks to such possibilities that biographies, including those of Bruno Schulz, are read not only by specialists, but also – and very willingly – by outside readers who seek the shimmering truths of existence. By finding Schulz’s childhood, we will perhaps be able to open up a new perspective to them as well. For someone to repeat one day: “Schulz, my fellow man”<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> M. P. Markowski, *Cień biografą*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/cien-biografy-145068> (retrieved: 24 January 2021).

<sup>71</sup> See Jakub Orzeszek, *Schulz nasz bliźni*, “Schulz/Forum” 12, 2018, p. 4.