

Jakub Orzeszek: Schulz and Mourning. About the Writer's Second Body

The ethics of necrography

Talking about death in Schulz – about a death that will be “insinuated rather than represented”¹ in his work – is something completely different than talking about Schulz’s death. The former is suggested in various ways, mediated in metaphors or the emotional aura of the fragment, and is revealed in more or less “hypnagogic, imageless hallucinations”². Its domain is aesthetics. The discourse about it constantly teeters on the verge of silence, but sometimes – as it seems to me – you can capture the impression of its presence for a moment through literature and art (although I do not know if there are general “principles of the aesthetics of death”, which Michel Guiomar wrote so inspiringly about). This second kind of death hits the body directly. It touches on a specific biography, has a date on the calendar, happens here and now. Its literal, irreversible factuality, as well as its corporeality and materiality, move the speaker much more into the realm of ethics – they make it easier to slip beyond the measure of appropriateness, into the appropriating violence of language or “obscenity of understanding”³, in the textual subordination of the deceased. This death requires a different kind of responsibility for words.

The first is inexpressible as an idea and therefore poses – or at least can pose – a particular challenge to style and imagination. The second one is inexpressible as an annihilating event that destroys references to meaning, “rapes the idea”⁴ and

1 In this way I have tried to approach the topic in *Śmierć (3). Antyhasło do “Słownika schulzowskiego”, “Schulz/Forum”* 10, 2017, p. 85–111. The present text is an extended version of the paper presented on November 17, 2018 during the 3rd Schulz Days in Gdańsk. It would never take this form if it were not for the discussion and valuable comments of Jerzy Kandziora, Urszula Makowska, Małgorzata Ogonowska, Józef Olejniczak, Hanela Palkova and Stanisław Rosiek, to whom I am grateful for their views.

2 M. Guiomar, *Principes d’une esthétique de la mort*, Paris: Corti, 1988; Polish translation: idem, *Zasady estetyki śmierci*, przeł. T. Swoboda, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, wybór i oprac. S. Rosiek, Gdańsk 2010, p. 82.

3 See C. Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding. An Evening with Claude Lanzmann”, in: *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. C. Caruth, Baltimore 1995, especially p. 201–209.

4 Stanisław Cichowicz’s definition: “Śmierć: gwałt na idei lub reakcja życia”, in: *Antropologia śmierci. Myśli francuska*, wybrali i przeł. S. Cichowicz, J. M. Godzimirski, Warszawa 1993.

demands restraint from the speaker, because reading experiences and intellectual ambitions are irrelevant when one is talking about it.

Now it is the latter death that is of interest to me. I will inquire to what extent a series of tragic negative events – Schulz's death in the Holocaust and the destruction of his body – had an impact on the reception of his writing. Not so much on interpretations of his work (or at least not only of it⁵), but especially on the posthumous legend, elements of which keep returning – with almost paradigmatic force – in biographical discourses about Schulz and in literary and artistic references to his life and work. At the same time, I am aware of the dangers: universalization, banality, fabulation, “sanctimonious talk”⁶ that are associated with a subject matter formulated in this way. And I am not at all sure that by talking about Schulz's death as part of an academic debate, I am not involuntarily committing one of those transgressions that are considered ethically discouraging in Holocaust research. Of course, my intention was different.

I believe that a critical reflection on the models of commemorating Schulz, as well as on the specific narrative styles established in Schulzology, is necessary – if only to understand how much Schulzology, from the very beginning, was marked by the lack of properly experienced mourning. Mourning after the Holocaust on the one hand, and the personal mourning of Jerzy Ficowski and his correspondents on the other – the mourning described in letters sent to him after the war by witnesses of Schulz's life. This correspondence determined the content and, which is equally important, the rhetorical form of *Regions of the Great Heresy*⁷.

I admit that I feel some discomfort related to the overrepresentation of this model, which turns the figure of Schulz and his biography into an object of mournful cult. Unlike Janusz Rudnicki, however, I do not want to provoke or

5 See J. Olejniczak, “Dyskurs Zagłady – przed i po... (Wittlin, Wat, Schulz)”, in: idem, *Pryncypia i marginesy Schulza*, Gdańsk 2019, where the author writes that “the intensification of the ‘discourse of the Holocaust’ and the increasingly ‘tangled’ structure of the grand narrative about the Holocaust resulted in the interwar texts of Schulz – though not only them – being ‘absorbed’ by this discourse, and began to co-create this great story” (p. 138); and idem, *Powroty w śmierć*, Katowice 2009, p. 45–83.

6 T. W. Adorno, *Dialektyka negatywna*, przeł. K. Krzemieniowa, przy współpracy S. Krzemienia-Ojaka, Warszawa 1986, s. 507. On the ethics of scientific and literary writing about the Holocaust, a fundamental problem in Holocaust studies, see, among others, J. Leociak, *Tekst wobec Zagłady. O relacjach z getta warszawskiego*, Toruń 2016; idem, *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji*, Warszawa 2009; A. Ubertowska, *Holokaust. Auto(tanato)grafie*, Warszawa 2014; eadem, *Świadectwo, trauma, głos. Literackie reprezentacje Holokaustu*, Kraków 2007; *Reprezentacje Holokaustu*, wybór i oprac. J. Jarniewicz, M. Szuster, Warszawa 2014; *Stosowność i forma. Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?*, red. M. Głowiński, K. Chmielewska, K. Makaruk, A. Molisak, T. Żukowski, Kraków 2005; A. H. Rosenfeld, *Podwójna śmierć. Rozważania o literaturze Holokaustu*, przeł. B. Krawcowicz, Warszawa 2003.

7 On the rhetoric of *The Regions of the Great Heresy* and more: J. Kandziora, *Poeta w labiryncie historii. Studia o pisarskich rolach Jerzego Ficowskiego*, Gdańsk 2017.

to burn bridges. His two sketches from the series *Listy z Hamburga* [*Letters from Hamburg*] (episode seven and eight), published in "Twórczość" in 1992 – in the context of the hundredth anniversary of Schulz's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of Schulz's death – were openly directed against the "sacral"⁸ aspect of Ficowski's writing. They attacked the "hagiographic" story about Schulz's execution, parodying it in a bold, but also utilitarian, brutal, and perhaps even showy way. My proposal is different and – I hope – is situated beyond these antagonisms. Without forgetting about them or the difficult emotions that are embedded in them, I will try to look at the topics outlined here from the perspective of thanatology or necrohumanities. The purpose of this shift, both methodological and linguistic, is to recognize and name several problematic nodes which the future necrography of Schulz will have to address.

And such a necrography should certainly be written someday. Who knows, maybe it should be written now, in parallel with the biography of the author of *The Street of Crocodiles*, as its complement, because "only both of them together encompass the entirety of [...] posthumous existence"⁹. To make this possible, first of all, it is necessary to reconstruct the text of the end of Schulz's biography. It is this text that "blows up the framework of biographical discourse"¹⁰ and is also the first point of reference for all necrographic narratives.

November 19, 1942, before 12:00

Information about Schulz's death has been preserved thanks to witness accounts and stories from outsiders. However, these are often contradictory narratives, written down after many years, distorted by memory gaps or, contrarily, deeply emotional, affected by the trauma of loss or martyrdom. Today, they are often unverifiable.

The most complete attempt to unite this polyphony was presented by Jerzy Ficowski in three texts¹¹, published during the thirty years 1956–1986. At the

8 Rudnicki's attitude to Ficowski's style is best illustrated by the metaphor of a tree whose branches are bending under the weight of rotting fruit: "They are too sweet, bland and suspiciously pretty. A good kick would be the only salvation for this tree that grew out of sacred admiration. With some momentum, straight into the trunk. Everything that has faded would fall down, the branches freed from the burden of pathos would go up" – J. Rudnicki, *List z Hamburga* (8), "Twórczość" 1992, nr 10, p. 86.

9 S. Rosiek, *Zwłoki Mickiewicza. Próba nekrografii poety*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 110.

10 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

11 In the article *Przypomnienie Brunona Schulza* ("Życie Literackie" 1956, no. 6), in the final chapter of *Regions of the Great Heresy* (first edition 1967) and in the essay "Przygotowania do podróży" from the volume *Okolice Sklepów cynamonowych* (1986). The discourse of these three texts was discussed by Marcin Romanowski in the article *Śmierć Schulza*, "Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Poetica" 2016, no. 4, p. 82–101.

same time, the attempt is not free from a personal writing conception and literary procedures related to it, for example, coherence, arbitrary selection of content, and fictionalization. A critical reading of the sources on which Ficowski relied shows the shimmering nature of this message. It is therefore possible that it is here – in the chaos of discourses, in unverifiable, parallel variants, and not in the literary order of narrative – that the nightmare, but also the polyphonic truth of this death, is revealed.

There is no doubt about the date and place of the event – Bruno Schulz was shot on November 19, 1942 at the intersection of ul. Czackiego and ul. Mickiewiczza, opposite the Judenrat (about a hundred meters from his former family home at the Market Square), in the campaign of murdering Jews, after which the inhabitants of Drohobych later called that day “Black Thursday”. It is estimated that from one hundred¹² (estimation by Michał Chajes) to two hundred and thirty¹³ (Samuel Rothenberg) people died in the Drohobych ghetto and the direct pretext for the Gestapo operation was the previous day’s brawl, as a result of which the Jewish pharmacist Kurtz-Reines, defending himself against arrest, injured SS-man Karl Hübner in the finger. Panic broke out. According to Ficowski’s findings, the attackers started shooting at passers-by without warning, “ran behind those escaping to the gates of houses, killed those hiding in staircases and apartments”¹⁴. Schulz was nearby, probably on his way to the Judenrat to buy food. Izydor Friedman (Tadeusz Lubowiecki), a friend of the writer and witness of his death, recalls: “A gestapo man Günther caught Schulz, who was physically weaker, and then held him down, and put a revolver to his head and shot him twice”¹⁵.

Most often, it is believed that the identity of the murderer is certain: SS-Scharführer Karl Günther appears in many independent accounts, including those by Emil Górski, Leopold Lustig, Alfred Schreyer and Abraham Schwarz. Moreover, the view became established that Schulz’s death was a kind of revenge on another Gestapo officer, Schulz’s protector, Feliks Landau, who had previously shot Günther’s protégé – a dentist, Mr Löw (Ficowski’s version¹⁶) or the carpenter Mr Hauptman (Lustig’s version, quoted by Henryk Grynberg¹⁷). Günther

12 Michał Chajes’ letter to Jerzy Ficowski from June 18, 1948 is in the Jerzy Ficowski archive in the National Library (Korespondencja Jerzego Ficowskiego, tom 4: C, III 14533). Quoted in: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków. Listy, wspomnienia i relacje*, oprac. J. Kandzióra, Gdańsk.

13 S. Rothenberg, *List o zagładzie Żydów w Drohobyczu*, wstęp, opracowanie i przypisy E. Silberner, Londyn 1984, p. 13.

14 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, Sejny 2002, p. 506.

15 *List Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana) do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 23 czerwca 1948 roku*, “Schulz/Forum” 7, 2016, p. 207.

16 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 220.

17 H. Grynberg, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, Warszawa 1997, p. 35.

would later boast publicly to Landau: "I've shot your Jew!"¹⁸. However, it must be said that there is at least one more version that does not confirm this account. It is included in the reports from the Holocaust written by surviving Jews from Drohobych in 1946, 1947 and 1958 at the Historisches Institut in Israel in Haifa. All witnesses – Chaim Patrych, Moses Marcus Wiedmann, Theodora Reifler and Josef Weissmann – claim that Schulz's murderer was not Günther, but Friedrich Dengg, a Gestapo man whose name Ficowski ignores for some reason, even though he had these sources in his archives¹⁹. The testimony contained in these reports also add several other differences to Ficowski's narrative. However, these accounts are inconsistent in some details and may be why they were considered unreliable by the biographer.

There is no certainty about the time of the incident. Emil Górski, a former student, and later a friend of Schulz's, claims that he saw him before noon, when he visited him at the Gärtnerei workplace in ul. Św. Jana. "The news of Schulz's death reached me very quickly, maybe an hour after he left me"²⁰ – he declared in 1982, which would mean that the writer died around 11:00 or 12:00 am. Another participant in the events, Alfred Schreyer – supported by Abraham Schwarz – argues against this, and claims the "wild action" of the Gestapo began much earlier, certainly before 9 am, and Schulz could have been murdered "even before eight o'clock"²¹. I find a similar chronology in Adela Hilzenrad's diary, kept from June 1941 to August 1944. The author, who was hiding outside the ghetto

18 "Requiem. Alfred Schreyer i Abraham Schwarz rozmawiają o śmierci Brunona Schulza", in: M. Kitowska-Lysiak, *Schulzowskie marginalia*, Lublin 2007, p. 146. Schulz's fatal involvement in the rivalry between Gestapo men, even if it may seem unbelievably confabulated, appears in several independent and early testimonies. After the war, it became one of the most enduring elements of the writer's posthumous legend and has been processed as a "biographeme" many times in both artistic and historical-literary interpretations of his biography.

19 Dengg's name does not appear even once in Ficowski's work. It is mentioned in Alfred Schreyer's conversation with Abraham Schwarz, but in a completely different context – not as the name of Schulz's murderer, but as Schwarz's "good Gestapo man" and "protector" (*Requiem*, p. 145–147). In Budzyński's book, Dengg is included in the list of Gestapo men from Drohobych, but this author also claims Schulz's murderer was undoubtedly Karl Günther – W. Budzyński, *Miasto Schulza*, Warszawa 2005, p. 416. The archives at Yad Vashem contain an indictment against Dengg and the remaining Gestapo men from Drohobych for "murdering the population in a cruel way" and organizing "actions against Jews", but without specifying the date of November 19, 1942. See Yad Vashem Documents Archive, M.9 – Jewish Historical Documentation Center, Linz (Simon Wiesenthal Collection), File Numbers: 46, 812, <https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=global&strSearch=Friedrich%20Dengg&GridItemId=3685799> (retrieved: 9.04.2019).

20 B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty, wspomnienia o pisarzu*, oprac. J. Ficowski, Kraków–Wrocław 1984, p. 75. The typescript of the sketch, signed by Emil Górski with the date: "November 1982", is in Jerzy Ficowski's archives in the National Library (Korespondencja Jerzego Ficowskiego, volume 7: Goł – Gwa, III 14546). Cited after: *Bruno Schulz w oczach świadków*.

21 *Requiem*, p. 148.

in Drohobych on the day of Schulz's death, wrote that the shooting lasted from about 8 to 11 am – and it was provoked by Günther and Landau²².

Reports about the alleged escape from Drohobych, supposedly planned by Schulz for November 19, are also unclear. Researchers tend to agree that Schulz could have had false Aryan documents (*Kennkarte*) at that time – someone from the writer's circles in Warsaw could have organized the papers (maybe the underground activist Tadeusz Szturm de Sztrem²³ or Zofia Nałkowska²⁴) and they were probably delivered to Schulz from Lviv by the Home Army²⁵. Another version is given by Harry Zeimer, a former student of Schulz, according to whom documents were organized for Schulz by Tadeusz Wójtowicz, a friend from Drohobych, associated with the resistance movement²⁶. The writer had probably been planning for several months to travel to Warsaw, as is suggested by, for example, the efforts he made in 1942 to secure the manuscripts and drawings, and by the account of Zeimer, who testified at Landau's trial that some time before his death ("at the last minute"²⁷) Schulz "gave up escaping with them"²⁸. Ficowski believes Emil Górski, who remembered that on the day of the shooting, Schulz was ready to leave and visited him just to say goodbye²⁹. On the other hand, Izidor Friedman does not confirm this belief. On the contrary, he describes Schulz at the time as a broken man, deprived of hope for survival and of any will to live – someone delaying escape and unable to take any action.

22 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Collections, Hilzenrad family papers, Diary 1941–1944, Box 2 / Folder 1, Accession Number: 2011.278.1, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn44069> (access: 8.04.2019).

23 *List Tadeusza Lubowieckiego (Izydora Friedmana) do Jerzego Ficowskiego z 23 czerwca 1948 roku*, p. 207.

24 J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 85.

25 However, the accounts of Kazimierz Truchanowski – who many years after claimed that, as a forger in Spała, he was the main initiator and coordinator of Schulz's rescue operation – seem unreliable. See K. Truchanowski, "Spotkania z Schulzem", in: *Przymierzanie masek. In 100. rocznicę urodzin Kazimierza Truchanowskiego*, pod red. Z. Chlewińskiego, Płock 2004, p. 30–31, as well as critical letter by Jerzy Ficowski, quoted in the article by Jerzy Jarzębski *Komentarz do komentarzy: Schulz edytorów*, "Schulz/Forum" 3, 2013, p. 105–111.

26 A. Grupińska, *Śmierć Brunona Schulza. O "czarnym czwartku" w Drohobyczu opowiada Harry Zeimer – uczeń i przyjaciel Schulza*, "Życie" 2001, nr 98, p. 14. Reprint of the conversation published in "Czas Kultury" 1990, no. 13–14.

27 Quoted in: J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 220.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Artur Sandauer had a radically different attitude to Schulz's escape. For years he argued that Schulz not only did not plan to leave that day, but was actually looking for death, and Günther's murder was in fact the writer's suicide committed by someone else. However, Sandauer based his views on this subject not on the basis of testimonies, but on his own interpretation of Schulz's work for, in which he saw primarily a masochistic drive towards self-destruction, understood quite literally. See A. Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1982, p. 36–37, where he formulates the above judgments in the most direct way. Sandauer's statements contributed to the intensification of the dispute between him and Ficowski.

Schulz's body lay in the street for almost 24 hours³⁰. However, the circumstances of the writer's burial remain unclear. Jerzy Ficowski and Wiesław Budzyński accept the testimony of Friedman, who in a letter to Ficowski from 1948 declares that the morning after the shooting he buried Schulz in the old Jewish cemetery in Drohobych³¹. This would agree with the account of Abraham Schwarz, who – as a member of the group collecting bodies on the orders of the Germans – remembered that the gravediggers did not move the dead Schulz because “someone was about to come, he just went to get a cart in which he wanted to transport Schulz's body to the old cemetery [and bury it next to his mother – J.O.]”³². Jerzy Jarzębski expressed a different opinion. He supported the account of Leopold Lustig, who claimed that he had also participated in “clearing” the ghetto of the dead. According to him, Schulz's body was transported together with others to the new Jewish cemetery and buried there together with the body of the carpenter Hauptman (Günther's protégé). Lustig even remembered the place: “They were lying near the wall, from the entrance to the right, and there we buried them in one grave”³³. There is at least one more version of these events, repeated by Budzyński after the Drohobych teacher of Polish, Dora Kacnelson, but due to the lack of similar testimonies it is impossible to assess her credibility. Kacnelson knew a certain Hauptman (not a carpenter), who, many years after the war, allegedly claimed that, together with other Judenrat employees, he had buried Schulz's body – almost three days (!) after the shooting – in a mass grave opposite the synagogue, next to the old Jewish cemetery³⁴.

However, regardless of which account of the events we consider true, we must state clearly that Schulz's actual burial place remains unknown. The old Jewish cemetery no longer exists. A housing estate was built in its place in the 1950s. The new Jewish cemetery, now devastated, is covered with wild grass and bushes.

The materiality of metaphor

Negative metaphors through which twentieth-century thanatology conceptualized death, such as “rupture”, “fracture”, “trap of non-existence”, “aggression of

30 As evidenced by accurate and consistent accounts, among others by Ignacy Kriegel (H. Grynberg, *Drohobycz, Drohobycz*, p. 35), Abraham Schwarz (*Requiem*, p. 149) or that of Bohdan Odynak, who describes the scene of robbing Schulz's corpse of the watch (*ibidem*, p. 150–151).

31 Letter from Tadeusz Lubowiecki to Jerzy Ficowski of June 23, 1948, p. 207–208.

32 *Requiem*, p. 149.

33 H. Grynberg, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

34 W. Budzyński, *Schulz pod kluczem*, Warszawa 2013, p. 16.



Alleged place of burial of Bruno Schulz at the Jewish cemetery in Drohobych, photo by Jerzy Jarzębski

rot”³⁵, “revelation of the pain of existence”³⁶, “emptiness that breaks into the fullness of life”³⁷, “hour of absurdity”, “scandal”³⁸, become crudely literal here. At the same time, they are insufficient, despite all the brutality they evoke, even despite the undoubted connections between this way of conceptualizing death and the experience of the “slaughter of great wars”³⁹ (Ariès writes about the experience of a “foul death”), in whose shadow the first generation of thanatologists in Europe was formed. The murder of Schulz goes beyond the act of a street execution – it also concerns the posthumous fate of the body that his murderers first sentenced to humiliating exposure, and ultimately to annihilation in the unknown (most likely mass) grave. This is perhaps the most radical and hateful form of necroviolence⁴⁰, which – for the Jewish tradition, as well as for the broadly understood Western culture – is constituted by the instrumental removal of a body or grave equivalent to the intention to remove the trace of somebody’s existence – something Holocaust researchers, as if tautologically, call “necroicide”⁴¹, killing a dead one. There is nothing metaphorical about this tautology, there is only the dull horror of the act.

Schulz ≠ Mickiewicz

“Matter – even a shred of it, a small remnant, even a handful of dust – is indispensable for the dead’s activity in history. Thanks to it, the dead maintain their ties with the world and enter into new relationships with the living, who – yes, they do! – assign a considerable sovereignty to the deceased. Material remains (corpse, coffin, grave, things belonging to the dead) replace the body annihilated by death”⁴². The author of these words and the originator of the genre of necrography, Stanisław Rosiek, writes further about the “great transformation” of the deceased, referring to many symbolic practices through which the living try to

35 L.-V. Thomas, *Trup. Od biologii do antropologii*, przeł. K. Kocjan, Łódź 1991, p. 5.

36 M. Vovelle, “Historia ludzi w zwierciadle śmierci”, in: idem, *Śmierć w cywilizacji Zachodu. Od roku 1300 po współczesność*, przeł. T. Swoboda, M. Ochab, M. Sawiczewska-Lorkowka, D. Senczyszyn, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2008, p. 45.

37 V. Jankélévitch, *Tajemnica śmierci i zjawisko śmierci*, przeł. S. Cichowicz, J. M. Godzimirski, in: *Antropologia śmierci*, p. 45.

38 Ibidem, p. 59.

39 P. Ariès, *Człowiek i śmierć*, przeł. E. Bąkowska, Warszawa 1992, p. 559.

40 I borrow the term “necroviolence” from the American anthropologist Jason De León. According to his definition, it is “violence committed through special treatment of a corpse, perceived by the perpetrator and/or the victim (and the cultural groups they represent) as derogatory, sacrilegious, or inhuman” – J. De León, *The Land of Open Graves. Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, photographs by Michael Wells, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015, p. 69. See also J. Orzeszek, *Nekroprzemoc? Polityka, kultura i umarli*, “Twórczość” 2019, no. 5, p. 82–92.

41 E. Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała*, Warszawa 2017, p. 191.

42 S. Rosiek, op. cit., p. 57.

familiarize themselves with the irreversibility of separation, as well as to obscure the nothingness, Bataille's *informe*, into which corpses turn through thanatomorphosis. The great transformation therefore reduces the biological and semiotic crisis caused by death – it fills “the sudden gap in discourse”⁴³. The corpse, the “*outr-signifiant*”⁴⁴, as Louis-Vincent Thomas calls it after Jean-Thierry Maertens, returns to the order of discourse as “a place of convergence of many phantasms”⁴⁵.

This is done in two related symbolical procedures: “once by doubling the corpse, once by transforming it”⁴⁶, through the imagination and transformation of a dead body. The first practice involves creating images, likenesses, and representations of the deceased, which preserve his character *in effigie*. “Thanks to them, something like a “second” being is created”⁴⁷ – another body-image, not susceptible to the laws of biological decomposition, transferred to the realm of imagination and imaginings. “*Effigie*, taking the place of the mortal remains of the dead, takes over his functions, his properties and his dignity”⁴⁸. The second action directly involves matter and leads to the transformation of a dead body into a mourning object. This transformation begins when the body is ritually prepared for the burial ceremony and ends with the hiding of them in the grave and replacing them with a material signifier: a tombstone, a monument, a hand cast, a death mask. The key role is played by the grave, which – as the French thanatologist Jean-Didier Urbain writes – “hides the corpse and its inevitable physical and chemical future”. It is “the semiotic face of what is hidden by [...] a sign of affirmation, a positive sign, because – perceived phenomenologically (from the point of view of a person in mourning) – it allows us to be convinced of its full and unchanging referentiality, which is signalled by its very existence, allows an illusory idea to materialize, produces the effect of ‘somaticity’ or at least a presence that frees us from emptiness, from the sense of loss, from meaninglessness”⁴⁹.

The necrographer's task should be to trace both the material and symbolic history of the dead body, as well as to critically describe the “great transformation” – the process of re-building the bond between the dead and the living. However, it is clearly visible that Schulz's necrography would have to differ significantly from Mickiewicz's necrography, which was the subject of Stanisław Rosiek's studies. Indeed, the posthumous fate of the “Great Poet” and “Great Pole” could be

43 L.-V. Thomas, op. cit., p. 52.

44 Ibidem.

45 Ibidem, p. 51.

46 S. Rosiek, op. cit., p. 202.

47 Ibidem, p. 203.

48 Ibidem, p. 205.

49 J.-D. Urbain, “W stronę historii Przedmiotu Funeralnego”, przeł. M. L. Kalinowski, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, p. 322–323.

considered the opposite of the fate of Schulz. They are different in almost every respect. Not only in the moment and circumstances of death, but also in the models of existence they embodied. The biography of the former was already very public during his lifetime. It was a biography of the “hero of Poles”, and after his death it naturally became part of the mythologized and ideologized “narrative of the nation” (Homi Bhabha⁵⁰). The heroic and patriotic cult surrounding Mickiewicz’s remains should not be surprising. His necrographer can make use of a wealth of facts – both material (including the history of the body and then mourning objects, relics, souvenirs) and symbolic (including the discursive and political activity around the corpse and its representations).

Schulz’s biography – even though it was certainly not the biography of a “modest teacher from Drohobych” – was of a private nature, just like his work, which (unlike Mickiewicz’s) could not fit into the ideologies and expectations imposed on it by History⁵¹. In the posthumous legend, Schulz, as an artist and Holocaust victim, is surrounded by a martyrdom cult. In his case, however, this process of “symbolic recovery”⁵² was stopped. The unresolved experience of “ambiguous loss” weighs on him⁵³ – a loss that finds no support in matter and does not end in consolidation. Schulz’s necrography would differ, also methodologically, from Mickiewicz’s necrography, primarily because it would have to focus much more on tracing subsequent representations of the deceased *in effigie* and on the analysis of discourse. Schulz’s second body, the imagined and narrated body, exists not alongside but instead of – as a substitute for – the absent mourning object.

Deaths (after death)

It is significant that Jerzy Ficowski opens *Przypomnienie Brunona Schulza* from 1956 with an emotional, partly fictionalized description of the writer’s death. Not only this fragment, but the entire text, considered to be the beginning of post-war Schulzology, has the features of a “belated obituary”⁵⁴. At the same time, it completes Ficowski’s work, brings closure to it. The last edition of *Regiony wielkiej herezji* from 2002 has a motto that serves as an epitaph – the poem “Mój nieocalony” from the volume *Ptak poza ptakiem*, reprinted on the first page of this issue,

50 H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 155.

51 For which he was attacked, for example, by Kazimierz Wyka and Stefan Napierski.

52 J.-T. Maertens, “Nad otwartym grobem. Semiotyka zmarłego”, przeł. M. L. Kalinowski, in: *Wymiary śmierci*, p. 267.

53 See P. Boss, *Ambiguous Loss. Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

54 This fancy and accurate phrase was used by Marcin Romanowski during the conference at the 4th Schulz Days in Gdańsk in November 2019.

is like a lyrical tombstone placed for Schulz, but also a personal last will of the biographer, summarizing his many years of work. Between these two texts stretches almost half a century of searching for what “survived on scorched earth”⁵⁵, though it had been “doomed”⁵⁶ – all testimonies about Schulz, as well as his manuscripts and “existence archive”. Ficowski’s rescue mission also included commemorative activities.

In 1989, for example, in connection to the upcoming centenary of Schulz’s birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his death, the biographer tried unsuccessfully to lead to the funding of a symbolic tombstone for the writer in Warsaw. The monument, designed by Warsaw sculptor Marek Tomza, was to consist of two matzevahs, white and black, placed opposite each other. The first one was supposed to contain Schulz’s inverted lead autograph, the second one – a spherical mirror of black glass in which visitors could look at themselves against the background of Schulz’s actual signature⁵⁷.

However, many more such symbolic tombstones and epitaphs were placed for Schulz in the 20th – and are still added in the 21st century. An elegy to the tragic death of Schulz is probably the most common form of homage to the author of *The Street of Crocodiles* in literature, art, theatre, film, and music. A systematic description of these activities and artefacts, a critical characterization of them, from the most stereotypical representations and scenarios (Schulz as a defenceless Jew caught up in a rivalry between two Gestapo men) to the idiomatic ones (Schulz as a fish swimming away in the Baltic Sea) – is a task for a separate study. Several examples already show how large the research field is. One of the most famous and recognized obituary texts is undoubtedly Wojciech Jerzy Hass’s film *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* from 1973. The final scene – with the catabasis of Józef leaving the sanatorium, stumbling between countless tombstones and candles – is a reference to the Holocaust and gives the whole thing a mournful character. A less clear reference that is nevertheless predicated on necrological features can be found in Mirosław Bałka’s sculpture from 1982 entitled *Bruno Schulz*, in which a subtle analogy to the form of a death mask can be recognized. A peculiar (also because it teeters on the verge of kitsch) and less known example of Schulz’s literary obituary can be found in Włodzimierz Paźniewski’s essay collection *Życie i inne zajęcia*, also published in 1982. In the essay “Mesjasz na wakacjach w Truskawcu”, Paźniewski presents the writer’s last days in the convention of passion: Schulz

⁵⁵ J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*, p. 194.

⁵⁶ Idem, “Wprowadzenie do *Księgi listów* do wydania z roku 2002”, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 5: *Księga listów*, zebrał i przygotował do druku J. Ficowski, uzupełnił S. Danecki, Gdańsk 2016, p. 8–15.

⁵⁷ J. Ficowski, *Pomnik Brunona Schulza*, „*Życie Warszawy*” 1989, nr 14, <https://schulzforum.pl/pl/kalendarz/7-lipca-1989> (retrieved: 21.12.2019). See documentation of Marek Tomza’s project, published in this issue of Schulz/Forum.



Jan Szczepan Szczepkowski, **Bruno Schulz**
Pretending to Be Dead, 2006, 130 × 140 cm,
oil on canvas, private property

has the face of Christ, Landau is Pilate, Günther plays the role of Judas. In the background, Schulz's lost novel *Messiah* adds some more pathos – Paźniewski compares the unfinished work to the author's brutally interrupted biography⁵⁸.

The funeral-elegiac tradition does not weaken even in the latest references to the work and life of the author of *The Booke of Idolatry*. On the contrary. This is confirmed by Polish literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, not only Różewicz and his poem *W świetle lamp filujących* – but especially the poetry of authors born in the 1970s. For some of them, called by critics the poets of “emboldened imagination”, Schulz became both a literary patron and a “text” – a protagonist of their poems, whom they try to resurrect in various ways, but nevertheless always appearing in the shadow of his death (as in Radosław Kobierski's poems “Drohobycz” and “Śliwice” of 1999, Tomasz Różycki's *Zagłada wioski* of 2006, or Ewa Elżbieta Nowakowska's *Płachta śniegu* and *Nauczyciel robót ręcznych* of 2013). “The fact that Schulz's grave is missing, his remains cannot be found, despite the efforts made, inspires poets to show him as a ghost, an apparition, similar to a romantic revenant, or to include him in the realities of the world presented in his works, following the example of the projects contained in his prose to prolong the life of his father – turned into a bird, a worm or (a more innovatively) as an object in the environment – inconspicuous but distinguished by something special”⁵⁹ – writes Magdalena Rabizo-Birek. But at the same time, “it is impossible to work through this loss, this mourning, despite the passing of time”⁶⁰.

The same rule applies to responses in visual arts. In Jan Szczepkowski's painting from 2006, the Drohobych writer was depicted in a foetal position, on an empty street, with his face covered with his hands – this recognizable thanatic gesture was negated (though in fact only apparently, because the effect is rather the opposite) with the bitterly ironical title *Bruno Schulz pretends to be dead*. It is also worth mentioning two works from a project called *Bruno Schulz. Unnamed Artist* (2018) run by the Republika Marzeń Foundation. Both clearly refer to the circumstances of Schulz's death. The first one, by Paweł Althamer, entitled *Drzewo Schulz* [Schulz Tree], is a metal installation whose upper part, like a stripped tree crown, resembles the silhouette of a fallen man pierced with nail-thorns. Instead of leaves, there are soap mini-sculptures and fragments of brown sponge that imitate pieces of bread, studded into the structure. The author of the second work is Jerzy Kalina. His *W niebo stąpanie* [Stepping into Heaven], an installation originally

58 W. Paźniewski, *Życie i inne zajęcia*, Warszawa 1982, p. 123–138.

59 M. Rabizo-Birek, *Schulz poetów “ośmielonej wyobraźni” (preliminaria)*, “Schulz/Forum” 13, 2019, p. 80.-

60 Ibidem, p. 84. Interesting material in this respect is also provided by the 4th volume of the “Acta Schulziana” series from 2019, entitled *Bruno Schulz w poezji. Antologia otwarta*.



Mirosław Bałka, **Bruno Schulz**,
1982, photo by Janusz Fogler

placed in the Museum of Masovian Jews in Płock, consists of fourteen life-size figures of men, women, and children. Each of the figures, which together constitute an allegory of the victims of the Holocaust, holds a matzevah made of bread.

All these works and texts implement, as if following Ficowski, the saving *topos* of commemorating and making present the prematurely deceased writer – a victim of the Holocaust and necroicide. Despite the intentions of the torturers, commemorators try to pay tribute to him and... re-establish his lost somaticity. If you look at them from the perspective of anthropological investigation into mourning – they seem to participate in the cultural process of consolidation. They intend to create a kind of ritualized code that provides an outlet for chaos and disorder, thanks to which the aggressive charge is neutralized, and the self-destructive reality is replaced by a symbol⁶¹.

Does Schulz's death serve as a symbol, then? Jerzy Jarzębski drew attention to this normalising effect of funeral and martyrdom narratives about Schulz, at the same time noticing the danger of reductionism that is, contrarily to the intentions of their creators – inevitably connected to them. "At this point, Schulz's work merges for good with the writer's biographical legend, [...] Schulz-the-everyman also disappears; there remains a tormented Jew waiting for death". And further: "Schulz played both of these roles in his life, but – paradoxically – it was the latter that determined his international fame to a greater extent. As an artist and thinker, the Drohobych writer sets much higher requirements for his readers: he demands not only attention in reading and intelligence allowing them to associate and read various systems of signs, but also erudition allowing them to include in the process of receiving various literary and cultural contexts. As a Jew sentenced to death by the Nazi and trying, thanks to his painting talents, to postpone the inevitable execution, he requires mainly empathy"⁶².

Norman Ravvin writes in a similarly sceptical tone, analysing Schulz's posthumous presence in international literature, including the novels *The Messiah from Stockholm* by Cynthia Ozick, *See Under: Love* by David Grossman and *The Prague Orgy* by Philip Roth. Ravvin states that beyond the borders of Poland and beyond the reach of the Polish language, "Schulz's iconicity [...] arises largely from the grisly quality of that death, its status as a paradigmatic act of German violence against Jews in occupied eastern Europe"⁶³. "His face", writes Ravvin,

61 A. M. di Nola, *Tryumf śmierci. Antropologia żałoby*, przeł. M. Woźniak, R. Sosnowski, J. Kornecka, M. Surma-Gawłowska, M. Olszańska, Kraków 2006, p. 188.

62 J. Jarzębski, *Sklepy bławatne i sklepy cynamonowe*, in: B. Schulz, *Dzieła zebrane*, t. 2: *Sklepy cynamonowe*, wstęp i oprac. J. Jarzębski, dodatek krytyczny S. Rosiek, oprac. językowe M. Ogonowska, Gdańsk 2019, p. 17.

63 N. Ravvin, *Veneration and Desecration: The Afterlife of Bruno Schulz*, in: *Bruno Schulz: New Readings, New Meanings / Nouvelles lectures, nouvelles significations*, published under the direction of / publié sous la direction de S. Latek, Montreal–Cracow 2009, p. 61.

“is emblematic of the Holocaust”, regardless of the fact that the most frequently reproduced self-portrait is his *cliché-verre Dedication*, dated approximately 1920 (no self-portrait of the artist from the period after 1939 has survived).

In the imagination of the West, after his death, Schulz plays a role that is as if the opposite of Anne Frank's. While she “was transformed into the figure of a radiant young Holocaust saint, into the embodiment of a child's desire to live even in the face of terrible events, in a gracious announcement of the return of normality after the Holocaust”, Bruno Schulz as a counter-symbol of this consolation “must go down, again and again, to the murderer's bullet on the Drohobych street. In critical account after critical account, on book jacket after book jacket, in the prose of would-be acolytes, he is made to become his murder [...]”⁶⁴.

It is hard to disagree, at least to some extent, with Ravvin's concerns. Caught in a thanatic ritual, Schulz resembles one of those sad wax figures whose existence is sustained by “the habit [...] of exhibiting”. “All of them had hanging from their lips, dead like the tongue of a strangled man, a last cry”⁶⁵. I am reading this part of *Spring* and suddenly I am struck by the following phrase: the habit of representing mourning.

The writer's second body

However, I was wrong when I wrote that Schulz's necrographer must only rely on *effigies*. The material history of his body was not interrupted in November 1942. The posthumous body that exists beyond the lost grave are his works. Someone will say that in the end I give in to the “addiction to mourning”, seeking solace in apotheosis. That might be, indeed, the case. But I am not talking about Horatian survival in words and thanks to words. Because Schulz's body is not words that are more durable than those made of bronze, but sheets of paper, always ready to be removed, but nevertheless persisting by the power of some peculiar law of Odradek: manuscripts, drawings, graphics, official applications. How is this possible?

You just need to change your point of view, break away from the habitual oppositions: dead-living, inanimate-animate. Trust, instead, that there is transgression here – many transgressions in both directions. That the matter of Schulz's archive is not passive, but “takes on flesh” in contact with the researcher, comes to life, becomes an agent. “Wherever the crisis of the ‘real’ body appears, the power of necroperformance is released – the effects of a dead body mediated in material remains. Necroperformance does not ask about the subject – it is only

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 62. Emphasis – JO.

⁶⁵ B. Schulz, “Spring”, in: idem, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska, introduction by John Updike, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 59–60.

the remains and the remnants that affect the living. Necroperformance, therefore, documents what was unconscious, overlooked or pushed to the margins of political life and historical discourse in writing the history of the dead”⁶⁶. This is indeed Schulz’s second body, material and historical, which I did not recognize before – dismembered in archives, auctioned for tens of thousands of dollars, displayed in museums and art galleries, hidden by collectors like relics.



⁶⁶ D. Sajewska, *Nekroperformans. Kulturowa rekonstrukcja teatru Wielkiej Wojny*, Warszawa 2016, p. 38.