

# Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak: Comments on the Canon. Bruno Schulz's Adolescent Sketchbook and Frescoes in Landau's Villa

Schulz's *œuvre* – paintings, graphics, drawings – can be read in many ways. What image emerges from, for example, works signed, dated, and titled by the author? Is it the same as the one breaking forth from the abundance of sketches and small “anonymous” notes? A signature, an elementary determinant of attribution<sup>1</sup>, not only identifies, but also sanctions and even conceives the work; it confirms its authenticity, but simultaneously idealizes and dignifies it, integrates it into the area of convention, into the area of culture and art, making it discursive; it constitutes frames and therefore, limits the work artistically (in the case of Schulz, this situation applies primarily to “A Meeting” and other drawings, both from *The Booke of Idolatry* and the bookplates; Schulz's drawings are rarely signed). An “anonymous” note is completely independent, it is not obligated to anything, it does not have to be composed artistically, it remains non-discursive, a pure expression, a trace of the hand, and thus proof of the author's presence. In Schulz, these two parallel spaces reveal the tension existing in his work between the conceived, programmatic, artistic, and the non-artistic – primal, magical, ecstatic; between what – as a challenge – is addressed primarily to the potential interpreter, and what – as a confession – still belongs pre-eminently to the author. This perspective allows us to treat as “autobiographic” not only those texts and images that evoke associations (and sometimes even find reliable confirmation in messages) with a specific environment but also those that refer to “reality”, i.e. actual places, facts, people related to the author. From this perspective, one can look at both, all first-person written “records” and visual “outlines” with a recognizable author-protagonist in the main or subordinate role, as well as at “records” and “outlines” that could be considered traces of spiritual, “internal experience”, and those bearing traces of such an experience.

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of this term is consistent with the tradition of art history: to sign – from Latin *signare* – to signify, to seal; in practice, signature stands for, i.e. a handwritten record of the name or surname, or any symbol that allows identification.

The trace of this experience, and at the same time the trace of the hand, are mainly all those works that did not enter the canon, that is, were not included in it by the artist himself. Nevertheless, the canon here is not an absolute, once established, inviolable construction that would refer to one or another area of culture. The definition I am interested in assumes that the artist is the legislator of the “canon”. This term refers to his own work, to the way in which he reveals what is – in his opinion – more or less important in his work. However, as viewers and commentators, we can change the determinants of the canon, and move balance points, which allow us to notice increasingly different aspects of the analysed work. One possibility is to emphasize and recognize as canonical the works that were most pointed to by the artist himself: illustrations to his own works, works not only ennobled by their close connection with prose and literature in which the author, as he wrote to Witkacy, expressed himself “more fully”<sup>2</sup>, but also distinguished by the fact that – through press and book publications – they reached a mass, yet very special audience, which consisted of readers of the literary press and fiction. From this perspective, other works, not as often presented publicly, including personal ones, made for friends or dedicated to them, appear to be located on the outskirts of the canon.

If the term “canon” is understood here as a set of works recognized by the author, relevant, perhaps representative of his or her own *œuvre*, as a well-thought-out set, a collection of works that constitute an area of identification of the author and the work, then as a different example of a canon (than the above-mentioned) I would firstly acknowledge “A Meeting” and *The Booke of Idolatry*, as well as smaller works: bookplates and some drawings, such as “Sadistic Women” or “Bacchanalia”. However, small paintings and drawings that are either of a processual nature could be perceived as extra-canonical, showing the stages of creation, work *in progress* – or else those that are ultimately abandoned, or unfinished (including the adolescent sketchbook). It is impossible to find out why the latter work remained unfinished. Was it due to circumstances, lack of ability to compose further, dissatisfaction with the effect, or – although this is unlikely – part of Schulz’s artistic program? Unfinished, *non finito*, if a term most commonly intended for referring to the sculptural effect can be used here, without the final touch, *fini* certification in the form of, among others, a date and signature, which usually function as a craftsman’s house mark – all these terms are applicable to both the first, earliest works, spontaneous, navigated by the subconscious, retaining the status of primary, original material, as well as to

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<sup>2</sup> Bruno Schulz do St. I. Witkiewicza, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1935, no. 17; reprinted in: B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, opracował J. Jarzębski, wydanie 2 przejr. i uzupeł., Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998, p. 476 (the original Polish text of the following fragments of Schulz’s prose are located in this edition, the page numbers are given in brackets in the main text).

later ones – sketches, notes, conscious forms, mediated by acquired knowledge, unoriginal, also because they are often – as ideas and outlines – subordinated to drawings and painting.

It seems perilous, albeit natural, to think that the current state of Schulz's frescoes concurs with the effect of the unfinished works mentioned above. One may say that, among other things, it is the adolescent sketchbook that poses as a frame, the starting point, the opening of the bracket which closes with the frescoes from Landau's villa; everything else is in between. The canon would therefore emerge from the inside of the bracket made of the artist's earliest and latest works.

### Adolescent Sketchbook

Witnesses mention that the writer's artistic talent was noticeable – using the theological lexis from “The Age of Genius”, one should say: it was revealed – already at school. Talent is given and so is vision. The artist metaphorically wrote that the beginnings of his drawing were lost in the “mythological fog”<sup>3</sup>. “Mythological” here means old, legendary, passed down by word of mouth, not supported by any documents. Schulz was undoubtedly on point while describing the time and nature of these first attempts. The “fog” has not dissipated to this day. If we consider only the known facts, we will learn little about the artistic path of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops*. We have very limited sources of direct knowledge – mainly fragments of memories reconstructed by Jerzy Ficowski. However, some light is shed on the visual part of Schulz's body of work by quasi-testimonies of several of his own texts; but it must be remembered that they were created *ex post* – they are a kind of memory reconstruction, and probably also the result of “mythologization”. These include a quasi-letter to Witkacy, and in addition – also in the form of self-commentary, although of a slightly different nature – fragments of stories: the already quoted “The Age of Genius” and the title story from *The Cinnamon Shops*. An unmediated, priceless document remains, though, in the form of the above-mentioned adolescent sketchbook. It provides an intriguing insight into the nature of Schulz's early attempts as a draftsman; its pages could be considered the fruit of that passionate drawing – “in hurry, in panic, transversally, diagonally” – about which we read in “The Age of Genius”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 474.

<sup>4</sup> B. Schulz, “The Age of Genius”, [in:] idem, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, London: Penguin Books 2008, p. 133.

The sketchbook is most likely from 1907–1908<sup>5</sup>. At the time of making it, the author was about fifteen or sixteen years old, a student at the junior high school. His first mature works were created at least ten years later, and the stories from both collections, referring *ex post* to his youthful experiences – twenty-five (*The Cinnamon Shops*) or thirty (“The Age of Genius”) years later. Does it matter at all? Do the pages of the sketchbook decisively demonstrate, so to speak, the power of this vision that we later read about in the stories? It appears that they do not, and these early “scribbles” satisfy the artist’s belief that he expresses himself more fully in prose. But they also belong to the manifestations of “private mythology”, the concept that Schulz uses in his quasi-letter to Witkacy. “Drawing’s boundaries are tighter than these of prose”<sup>6</sup>, the author emphasises. Of course, he is right: the image in prose is not as overbearing as the image itself in painting, drawing, or in a graphic. But does it always have to be this way? “Tighter boundaries” are defined primarily by the program, aesthetics, and convention, as shown by mature works. The early ones seem, as I have already mentioned, free from limitations. The scribbles, this material trace of the hand on paper, apart from everything else, seem to, quite naturally, connect with the theological phase of revelation. And this is the most crucial aspect.

The sketchbook contains a set of mixed works of various nature. Some of them were made in pencil, some with a pen; in some cases, the author outlined both the obverse and the reverse, as we commonly say, with neither rhyme nor reason. There is no trace of thinking about composition, perspective, or any other order of organizing the surface of paper. One often gets the impression that a blind man was guiding the hand that painted the blurry pictures, palimpsests superimposed one on top of the other – the outlines of recognizable forms struggle to emerge from under the broken, looped lines. Sometimes the hand slides lightly across the surface, but from time to time also presses the pen firmly. Occasionally, the image emerges from a tangle of lines of varying intensity and at times, from clear black blots. We see portrait attempts, drawn hastily, and perfunctorily, and next to them are caricatures of unknown people (women and men). In addition, studies of floral or animal ornaments; among the latter, in several places, one can see a unicorn, which is, among other things, a symbol of love that renounces physical fulfilment and, concurrently, a symbol of sublimated sexuality. This appears interesting from the perspective of erotic themes that dominate the artist’s mature art. Other pages contain drawings that give the impression of outlines of characters from unknown fairy tales, such as the princess at the well or the

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<sup>5</sup> For more details, see my entry in *Słownik schulzowski*, oprac. i red. W. Bolecki, J. Jarzębski, S. Rosiek, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2003, p. 371–374; the sketchbook is in the collection of the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Schulz do St. I. Witkiewicza, p. 475–476.



A page from Bruno Schulz's sketchbook,  
1907-1908



giant king, which are associated – but rather by the aura than by the form of representation – with characters known from frescoes, which therefore can be considered as anticipating them.

The diverse nature of the drawings is striking. However, when we try to name and define it, we feel a sense of atrophy and insufficiency of the discursive language. This is the state that Schulz mentioned in his quasi-letter to Witkacy: the comment breaks the umbilical cord connecting the imaginary source of the performance with the author's "entire subject area". The comment concerned prose, but it can be extended to art. On this basis, a commentator, respectful of the artist's assumption, would be even more helpless. Of course, a similar situation applies to fine arts in general, but in this case the author's position is stated directly and publicly, so it is difficult to openly oppose it. But somehow you have to "make public" the content of the sketchbook and, as I mentioned, define its specificity. The variety of works indicates that their author was a talented teenager, completely independent of patterns and free of any teacher's domination. They prove both his ability to observe the surroundings and the ability to explore the psychological characteristics of the model, an example of which is, among others, the charming, carefully crafted – rather than, as Witkacy would say, "polished" – image of a young woman with her hair tied up in a bun. On the other hand, illustrations for fairy tales prove the author's ability to "think in images", and the simplification of animal silhouettes and plant representations show skill at stylization.

The most intriguing, however, are the drawings of fragments of Christ's face (?) and allegorical-symbolic compositions. In the first case, it would be the only such image in Schulz's entire oeuvre, while in the second, it would be necessary to take into account the fact that the sketchbook is an example of imponderables that allow for the reconstruction, at least partial, of the early (earliest?) attempts of Schulz to explore the sphere of erotic imagination. From this perspective, the most important is the simplified, yet idealized figures of naked women often appearing in these youthful exercises. In the most elaborate scene, one of them, winged, stretches out her hands to a naked boy running towards her, brought by another woman in a flowing dress. We will not find a direct continuation of this motif in Schulz's later work. However, its mysterious aura appears in the motif created probably around 1920, the first period of the artist's mature visual work (the second period should be dated to the mid-1930s, when he was working on the illustrations for *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*), dedicated to Stanisław Weingarten. A "bookplate with the Messiah" is how Władysław Panas identifies the figure of a young man fighting a dragon-crocodile<sup>7</sup>. In other

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<sup>7</sup> W. Panas, *Bruno od Mesjasza*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2001, p. 37–70.



Detail from Bruno Schulz's wall painting at  
Felix Landau's villa, 1942

depictions, we only see men in their prime or even older. The much more semantically relevant image of a hermaphrodite boy (the sexual characteristics of whom were neutralized, both in the bookplate and in the drawing from the sketchbook, which, by the way, can be seen as a kind of “diary of adolescence”) should therefore be compared with the androgynous Infanta from *The Booke* rather than with any other hero of the author’s artistic narratives. Of course, as will be discussed later, such a comparison opens up further possibilities – for instance, for juxtaposing a visual image (Infanta) and a literary image (Bianca). This type of perspective allows us to notice, in these seemingly carefree drawings, the very beginning determining further fermentations of the artist’s imagination. It can therefore be assumed that the sketchbook forecasts the artist’s mature work.

As a rule, it is believed that the drawings contained in the sketchbook do not display high artistic value. Years ago, I was inclined to think so too. Of course, in the context of canonical works, these are merely announcements and rehearsals. Regardless, they deserve more careful attention not only for belonging to the legacy of a Great Artist. It may be difficult to determine what part they constitute but they are worth appreciating. In this case, the sketchbook is not a rough draft, a collection of first notes; quite the opposite – it gains the status of a fair copy, a collection of recent records; the last ones at the first stage of the artist’s formation.

Dictionaries provide a different understanding of the term “rehearsal” than I assume here. A rehearsal is also an exercise, but this does not apply to Schulz’s “sketchbook”. Exercising means repeating, repeating, polishing. The sketchbook of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops* is not a notebook of an academician, who, by nature, studies, and perfects the mimetic record of observations in drawing, sometimes with a view to a future work. Here – with minor exceptions – we are dealing with pronounced and free expression. It is emphasized by the incompleteness of the works, the afore-mentioned *non finito* effect, which, understandably, in relation to Schulz the visionary, is not the result of the adopted aesthetic concept, but the spontaneous “product” of the hand. It determines the importance of the sketchbook in the context of the artist’s achievements, reflects what comes from outside us. According to Bolesław Miciński, the first stage of the creation process, “the preparatory phase, the elusive growth of the internal conflict that gives rise to creativity [...] is like collapsing into [...] oneself – weakening [the author’s] contact with the outside world”<sup>8</sup>. Later comes a phase in which the threads of “logical connections” between the images are drawn (Miciński writes about words, but in the case of images the principle is analogous), but the whole

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<sup>8</sup> B. Miciński, “Notatki o natchnieniu”, [in:] idem, *Podróże do piekieł. Eseje*, Warszawa: Biblioteka “Więzi” 2011, p. 88 and following.



is still elusive and amorphous. Only the third stage is “the moment of binding the unleashed demons”, taming the element of inspiration, and shaping the form. According to the above concept, the scribbles from the sketchbook are still far from their final stage.

## Frescoes

As for their visual structure, several drawings, created much later than the sketchbook, have, in many respects, a similar character – with *The Booke of Idolatry* or illustrations for stories in mind. However, what all of them have in common is an additional reason, a purpose defining them as they are subordinated to this purpose, and seem artistically captive. Although the thesis I would like to propose seems controversial, I am under the impression that only frescoes constitute a work comparable to the sketchbook on a scale of sovereignty and originality. Of course, the paintings in Landau's villa confuse us and the researcher. They force the question: “Should they be granted a place in the author's body of work, just as all the other works, or should they be treated only as evidence of oppression?” I would rather consider them as a victory for the artist, as the overcoming of a trauma. The frescoes are also rehearsals, but they are not exercises. Similarly to the works from the adolescent sketchbook, they are artistically selfless, although, of course, in the existential plane they had a specific address and purpose. However, if we say that the sketchbook is not art yet, then we are forced to admit, that the frescoes are not art anymore.

The history of these works is rather well known. Schulz made them (with the help of Emil Górski, who, according to reports and all probability, only filled the writer's original concept with paint)<sup>9</sup>, in 1942 in the residence of Feliks Landau in Drohobych<sup>10</sup>. It was a stately, three-story house at what was then ul. Świętego Jana 12, owned by the Jochman family before the war<sup>11</sup>. Emil Górski's account was difficult to confirm for many years, although Jerzy Ficowski made attempts to find the paintings. However, they seemed to have been destroyed before the next layers of paint were applied (after the war, someone lived in Landau's villa at what is today ul. Tarnowskiego 14). It was only on February 9, 2001, that the paintings were discovered by a German documentarian Benjamin Geissler, who

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<sup>9</sup> See memories of Emil Górski in: B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty. Wspomnienia o pisarzu*, zebrali i opracował J. Ficowski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1984, p. 74–75.

<sup>10</sup> Schulz himself submitted his job application as a draftsman to the Drohobych Judenrat. The painter also decorated the local Gestapo headquarters and the Reitschule (horse riding school) building with frescoes.

<sup>11</sup> Wiesław Budzyński states that on the parcel, apart from the villa, which was built “for rent”, there was a smaller, one-story house, inhabited by the owners (idem, *Miasto Schulza*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka 2005, p. 310; for an entire chapter on Landau's Villa, see p. 310–314).

was following their traces, inspired by his father Christian, and with the help of information published by Ficowski. Geissler played the role of an explorer, an archaeologist, and an obstetrician – thanks to him, Schulz the painter was born again, reborn for almost the last time<sup>12</sup>. Like a phoenix from the ashes. He shone like an ember bird.

The photographs taken on site were used as the basis for a film made by Geissler titled *Bilder Finden*. The date of its premiere was symbolic – it was November 19, 2002, the one hundred and tenth anniversary of the writer's death. The place was also chosen symbolically – the New York Center for Jewish History. The Polish-Ukrainian-Israeli quarrel over the theft of the paintings and their removal to Yad Vashem broke out before the film's premiere.

However, apart from this history, I would like to consider how, and on what basis, frescoes can be perceived as part of Schulz's artistic achievements. Do we find any artistic context for them, so to speak? Perhaps by adopting such a perspective, we will view them as individual works, that truly belong to the author – despite his oppressive situation – and are inscribed primarily in the field of history of art, and not only in the history of the Holocaust.

As a result of the Yad Vashem operation and the subsequent removal of the paintings' remains from the walls, the entire place was irreversibly damaged. That is what we assume. However, the term "entire" is not defined in this context. What is the scale of the gaps that do not result from damage? In other words: did Schulz achieve his goal? Were the frescoes completed and finished in his opinion? Either way, all we have today are fragments. Is our knowledge of the paintings in Felix Landau's children's room less exhaustive than it would be if we had a chance to see the walls as the author left them, after putting down the brush? We cannot fully verify the account of Emil Górski, who noted that generally, the author remained faithful to the creative method he used in both literature and art – to the principle of combining reality with imagination: "On the wall paintings in the Gestapo officer's apartment, in a fantastic fairy-tale setting, the characters of kings, knights, and squires had quite 'non-Aryan' facial features of people among whom Schulz was at that time. The similarity of their emaciated and tortured faces, captured by Schulz's memory, was extraordinary"<sup>13</sup>. However, even if we agree that one of the faces (the coachman) belongs to the artist himself, it will still be challenging to identify the others.

Perhaps the whole is illusory, impossible, and false; perhaps we only encounter the true whole when we put the fragments together. The whole is forcing, depressing, and inhuman, while the fragment is closer to us, tailored to human

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<sup>12</sup> I am leaving out small works that constantly appear at auctions; however, the probability of discovering a large set of Schulz's works, let alone other wall polychromes, seems to be quite low.

<sup>13</sup> E. Górski, "[Wspomnienie]", [in:] B. Schulz, *Listy, fragmenty*, op. cit., p. 74.

dimensions, more tangible, and specific. Finally, the whole is demanding, insistent, blackmailing the viewer, demanding attention, sometimes continuation, or completion; a fragment gives more possibilities, it is just like a drawing, a scribble of a child or any other individual focused on their own world – rebellious, non-schematic, open, anarchic, allowing you to let go of the pencil, pen or brush, tearing them off the page or canvas at any time. The whole is logical and obedient, and the fragment is rebellious. However, if we strive for truth rather than facts, the fragment is our ally. Moreover, it allows both the viewer and the artist to “delightfully fabulate”<sup>14</sup>, to fabricate. *Ergo*, the fragment (fragmentariness) is the essence of the whole.

Umberto Eco writes about works with a similar structure as “works in movement” (*opere in movimento*). He “invites us to identify inside the category of ‘open’ works a further, more restricted classification of works which can be defined as ‘works in movement’, because they characteristically consist of unplanned or physically incomplete structural units”<sup>15</sup>. An “artwork in motion” is a work that can be shaped in various ways, that is constantly in the phase of birth, that is open, mobile, changeable, uncertain, fluid. Schulz would say that thereby it “diffuses beyond its borders” (in this case, primarily the borders of an existential threat), blurs them, breaks rules and conventions, and is itself a guarantor of both, reality and freedom. Moreover, in Schulz’s work – as many authors have already pointed this out – we are dealing with a world that is becoming, unstable, uncertain, and therefore mediocre. Things are as they are, just “for appearances” sake, mostly unrealised. This is a key principle of Schulz’s aesthetics.

The paintings in Landau’s villa are, as we know today, the last works ever made by Schulz; and, as I have already mentioned, works made under extreme circumstances – under duress. For the artist, the room of Landau’s several-year-old children is a kind of burial chamber (the room is small, 240 cm in length and 180 cm in width). Geissler could feel like a discoverer of paintings in the Roman catacombs. The frescoes are of great historical importance, both from the perspective of micro- and macro-history, they are an individual biography, and a piece of collective fate. In the first sense, their creation is a specific, individual

14 I am recalling here the phrase used by Leszek Engelking, translator and author of the afterword to: M. Ajvaz, *Morderstwo w hotelu Intercontinental. Powrót starego warana. Inne miasto, Sejny*: Pogranicze 2007, p. 354.

15 U. Eco, *The Open Work*, translated by Anna Cancogni, with an introduction by David Robey, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 12. What is extremely important in the context I am interested in, is that Eco sees the announcement of “work in movement” in the book of Mallarmé (p. 40–45), while some researchers see it as a source of Schulz’s concept of the Book and its incarnation, which is *The Booke of Idolatry* – see A. Kato, “Obraz i Księga. O autoreferencyjności w twórczości Brunona Schulza”, [in:] *Białe plamy schulzologii*, red. M. Kitowska-Łysiak, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2010, p. 151–167.

biographical and artistic (f)act, in the second sense – as “Holocaust murals” – they are a fact from the history of the Shoah.

Schulz painted the scenes with perishable “powder paints with casein glue, which you can make yourself from milk or cheese”<sup>16</sup>. In the technological sense, they were not frescoes (*al fresco*), i.e. polychromes made on a wet surface, although the term stuck to them. It is also consistent with the colloquial use of the term – as the name of any wall painting, regardless of the technique of execution. However, the *al fresco* technological process is long and complicated and, above all, requires a specially prepared multi-layer substrate and, usually, prior preparation of cardboards (mainly because it is difficult to make corrections, which may even require chipping off the top layer of plaster). The technique chosen by Schulz is rather closer to *al secco* – the dry fresco technique, where paints are applied directly to dry plaster. While it was rarely used in the 19th century, in the 20th it was perceived as anachronistic. Some circumstances may have prompted the artist to use this particular method, which is less complicated and simultaneously allowed him to work faster: the pressure of the situation – the tension resulting from the need to complete the task in a short time, lack of experience in monumental painting, or shortage of appropriate materials. It is worth noting that because *al secco*, among other reasons, does not require prior preparations, it allows for the directness of the painting gesture, the effect of which may be corrected, but itself remains fresh and, similarly to a sketch, for an element of the original expression. We will never find out whether Schulz had artistic ambitions with the frescoes, but we can be almost certain that he did not treat them solely as a form of ransom that he had to pay to survive. Emil Górski noted that even in a space filled with death, Schulz “somehow managed to remain faithful to his creative principle”<sup>17</sup>. Górski saw its essence in the combination of what is real (visible, possible to experience sensually and mentally) with what is imagined, in this case, fairy tale. Let me quote a fragment of his memories once again: “The figures of kings, knights, and squires had quite ‘non-Aryan’ facial features of the people among whom Schulz was at that time”. We know this technique both from prose and earlier works of art.

In one of Schulz’s most important stories, in the seventeenth chapter of “Autumn”, we read about “great breeding grounds of history”, “factories of plots”, and “hazy smoking rooms of fables and tales”. Would we also be “among the Mothers” if we entered the space of the stories presented in the “frescoes”? If every fragment of reality is a reflection of an eternal myth, then the whole is redundant. Well, maybe we should not even try to find out what form the whole has.

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<sup>16</sup> I quote from Andrzej Osęka, citing the expertise of specialists from the Warsaw University of Technology; see idem, *Nie ma “fresków” Schulza*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2001, no. 132.

<sup>17</sup> E. Górski, “[Wspomnienie]”, op. cit., p. 74



Although it sounds cruel, it must be said that in the case of frescoes, the situation favoured the choice of technique. Based on what we can see today, it is difficult to imagine the original state. We do not know which of the effects – especially when it comes to colours – are traces of the artist's hand. What is the result of the conditions that prevailed for many decades in the Landau villa, inhabited by the Kałużny family after the war? What is the degree of mechanical damage caused when fragments were hastily removed from the walls? Has conservation – both carried out at Yad Vashem and in the Drohobyczyna Museum – brought us any closer to the original? There are too many unknowns for us to be able to answer these questions.

However, what remains to be seen is not easy to describe. Striking, at first glance already, is the freshness of the colours and the simplicity of the representations, their naturalness, and – to use Mieczysław Wallis's beautiful, extremely vivid expression, referring to Monet's late paintings – “the blurring of contours”<sup>18</sup>, the elusiveness of form. Schulz clearly tried to produce a form of order without reaching for patterns or conventions. He referred to childhood associations. The characters had to be recognizable, so the dwarf has a red pointed hat, the princess with an apple in her hand is young and slender<sup>19</sup>, and the old woman – stooped, with her head covered with a traditional scarf. What attracts attention is the image of the coachman, who some authors perceive as a portrait of Schulz himself<sup>20</sup>. The same applies to animals: the horses rear up and the cat holds its tail up in a characteristic way (this exceptionally charming image – unlike the discoveries with figures of horses that ended up at Yad Vashem – remained in Drohobych). However, these are not standard illustrations for fairy tales. The identity of the characters is not unambiguous, even though individual fragments of the play complement and comment on each other, revealing a narrative dynamic. Although we cannot fully recreate the logic that governs the entire set of images, we can identify the young woman as Snow White and connect her and the dwarves, the old woman Witch and the saviour Prince into one story. This is a Brothers Grimm's tale, which German children knew from the beginning of the 19th century, and Polish children learned about only in 1895, when the Polish translation of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* was published (in the Polish version the title was *Baśnie dla dzieci i młodzieży*). Landau's children – Uwe (?) born in 1928 and Helga, one year younger<sup>21</sup> – certainly knew this book, but

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<sup>18</sup> M. Wallis, *Późna twórczość wielkich artystów*, Warszawa: PIW 1975, p. 189.

<sup>19</sup> In some accounts, the woman appears as a princess; according to Wiesław Budzyński, she has the face of Felix Landau's second wife – Gertrude Segel, married to him at the beginning of May 1943, but already brought to Drohobych from Radom at the end of 1941 (see idem, *Miasto Schulza*, p. 365).

<sup>20</sup> See M. Michalska, *Polski protest*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2001, no. 138.

<sup>21</sup> I quote from W. Budzyński, *Miasto Schulza*, p. 419.

the choice of a text that was to be illustrated on the walls of the room (it is not clear whether the children shared one room or had separate bedrooms<sup>22</sup>), was probably made by the father only in consultation with them. The story about *Schneewittchen* was particularly popular, it had a clear moral and was perfect for decorating a children's room, both for a girl (the story about a Princess) and for a boy (there is the chivalrous Prince – the Princess's liberator from the rule of the Evil Stepmother).

Iconographically, at the level of what-is-visible, the works, though not at all trite in many other aspects, appear to be trivial. Schulz does not seem to go beyond fairy-tale intrigue and character attributes recognizable by a young reader. However, the visual language used by the author reveals more and clearly distinguishes his work from book illustrations from that era, to which one would naturally like to compare them: book illustrations from the beginning and, by extension, from the first half of the 20th century are dominated by linearity and flat plasticity. Sadly, this area of reference is not the most pertinent, since we are dealing with works made using a different technique than most illustrations (drawings, graphics). The author of the idea was Landau; perhaps he wanted to implement the decorations he knew from his childhood to the villa in Drohobych, or he gave in to a trend prevailing in Germany... It is difficult to decide and unfortunately, I have not been able to find any documentation that could verify any such hypothesis. Besides, Schulz did not know the suggested technique, neither from personal experience nor from reproductions. They were created on individual orders and were not popularized by professional literature on art, because they were simply not considered artworks.

Schulz's wall polychrome with a motif taken from *Kinder und Hausmärchen* has its own aesthetics. He used the potential of the technique: as I mentioned, he thinned out the paint and softened the stain, making the figures and objects appear to be painted in watercolour, and at the same time resembling those we know not only from pictures drawn or painted for children, but also by children. But there is much more to define the sovereignty of frescoes. They have the author's stamp thanks to several other elements, the hierarchy of which is difficult to establish, since all of them are equally important: starting with the method of "lending credibility" to the depicted story, through the use of specific, real images, primarily one's own (the coachman), through the similarity between some heroes and figures that appear earlier in the sketchbook, to the key aspect – the idea of "returning childhood" and "regression", which seems to have been realized in this particular painting project, and about which the author of *The Cinnamon*

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<sup>22</sup> Most authors write about Landau's "son's room", omitting the fact that the officer also had a daughter.

*Shops* wrote in a letter to Pleśniewicz, identifying it, as we know, with the concept of the “age of genius”<sup>23</sup>.

These issues seem to coincide in the motif of a carriage with horses, which appeared in the artist's body of work – both visual and literary – in all its phases, starting from childhood, through the mature stage (see prose illustrations, among others), to – as exemplified by the paintings in Landau's villa – the last days of his life. In his often-quoted quasi-letter to Witkacy, Schulz refers to this image, emphasizing that in his childhood he initially drew only carriages with horses. “The procedure of riding in a carriage – we read – seemed to me to be full of importance and hidden symbolism. Around the age of six or seven, the image of a horse-drawn carriage with an open booth, burning lanterns, and leaving the night forest came back to my drawings again and again. This image constitutes the base of my fantasy, it is a nodal point of many lines escaping into the depths. To this day I have not exhausted its metaphysical content”<sup>24</sup>. The author further mentions images “of decisive importance” that appear in childhood, “statute the iron capital of the spirit” and “set the limits of artists' creativity”. The horse carriage is one of them.

“These are wonderful drawings”, says Szloma about Józef's drawings, created in ecstasy, and adds: “the world has passed through your hands in order to renew itself”; in his opinion, the drawings were created to restore “the reflection of divine hands”<sup>25</sup>. Józef replies that he is not sure of his authorship, that he feels as if “something outside” him had used his inspiration, and at the same moment he confesses that he found the Original: “in the bottom of the drawer lay the long unseen, precious, beloved script”<sup>26</sup>. In a semantic sense, the drawings are adjacent to the Authentic and have a similar status to it. Doesn't it remind us of the case of the adolescent sketchbook and the frescoes? Do not youthful scribbles and illustrations to popular fairy tales belong to the same world as the knick-knack in the chest of drawers? This seems to be the case – they belong, in Kantor's words, to “a lower-rank reality”. This aspect unites them all, and this unifying brings the frescoes out of the space of death, allowing us to break the thanatological veil and see them, just like the drawings from the “sketchbook”, as artistic attempts, this time not the first, but the last ones. It can therefore be said that both, the fairy tale motif and its essence, are aspects that allowed Schulz to go beyond the oppressive situation and include frescoes in his body of work.

<sup>23</sup> B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, wyd. 2, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002, p. 113–114 (letter of March 4, 1936).

<sup>24</sup> Bruno Schulz do St. I. Witkiewicza, p. 474.

<sup>25</sup> B. Schulz, “The Age of Genius”, [in:] idem, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, London: Penguin Books 2008, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 139.

The paintings in Landau's villa are a symbol of suppressed freedom, but freedom nonetheless. The eleventh hour of a Great Artist who wants to save not only his life but also, and perhaps above all, the integrity of his art.

To sum up, it must be said directly: a sketchbook, just like the knick-knack, is an emanation of the Authentic; viewed from the same perspective, the frescoes cease to be "Holocaust murals" and become yet another of its incarnations, the incarnation of the Authentic. As a result, Schulz, as an artist, manages to escape fate.

*Translated from Polish by Language Extreme*