

# Marek Wilczyński: Polish Galician Fiction Before and After the War. Bruno Schulz in the Context of Holocaust Literature

One day, my brother, returning from school, brought the improbable and yet true news of the imminent end of the world.

Bruno Schulz

The motto of this essay comes from Bruno Schulz's short story *The Comet*, published in 1938 in the 35th issue of *Wiadomości Literackie* shortly before the infamous *Kristallnacht* of November 9-10, of which the author naturally could not have known at the time of publication. Nonetheless, he was probably aware of what had been going on in Germany for some time and, for obvious reasons, must have felt uneasy at the very least. Unfortunately, nothing he wrote after the outbreak of war, and then after the German aggression against the USSR and the establishment of the Drohobych ghetto, survived, so it would be an abuse to speculate about Schulz's artistic intentions in the face of the end of his world and himself. Still, the literary historian is dealing with a process – a sequence of texts, among which the earlier ones were written without knowledge of the later ones. Yet, their proximity in an *ex-post* perspective is not a matter without significance.

In an essay that is as concise (three pages only) as brilliant, entitled "Kafka and His Precursors," Jorge Luis Borges declares: "The fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation, the identity or plurality of men doesn't matter.<sup>1</sup>" Before this emphatic conclusion is made, a statement is made that follows from the preceding juxtaposition of works from different eras and countries with the fiction of the author of *The Castle*:

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1 Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," transl. Eliot Weinberger, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger. New York: Penguin, 2000, 365.

If I am not mistaken, the heterogenous pieces I have listed resemble Kafka; if I am not mistaken, not all of them resemble each other. This last fact is what is most significant. Kafka's idiosyncrasy is present in each of these writings, to a greater or lesser degree, but if Kafka had not written, we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist.<sup>2</sup>

Not coincidentally, Borges cites T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in a footnote. He is well aware that more than thirty years earlier, Eliot had realized the same thing: an outstanding poet not only influences his successors but also makes them look at their predecessors differently by the fact that they become his predecessors.<sup>3</sup> Another example of a similar line of reasoning is provided by Harold Bloom who developed an esoteric typology of the relations between "strong poets" and their rebellious heirs.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the direction of influence is clear: the past shapes the present. After all, what happens to the history of literature if one accepts Borges' paradoxical perspective? Can a reading of a "strong" writer, as Schulz undoubtedly was, acquire unexpected meanings when confronted with those born later?

The end of the world announced suddenly in "The Comet" does not come to pass for a peculiar reason. For no reason at all, the menacing celestial body simply goes out of fashion with time, just as Halley's Comet went out of fashion as a topic in the press in 1910. "The bolide," as Schulz writes self-consciously probably by analogy with "satellite," "was doomed, it has been outdistanced forever. [...] Left to itself, it quietly withered away amid universal indifference."<sup>5</sup> Seemingly similar is the case in a short story by Ida Fink, a native of Zbarazh in the Ternopil province that used to border on the Lviv province, to which Drohobych belonged, titled "Mój pierwszy koniec świata" [My First End of the World]. There the news of an impending global catastrophe is brought by a servant girl:

The news of the impending end of the world was brought by Agafia from the market. She rushed into the kitchen out of breath, pale on her face, threw the shopping basket into a corner and shouted to her mother in a frightened voice: - You know, at the market, they say that in a month there will be the end of the world!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Borges, 365.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Points of View*. London: Faber & Faber, 1941, 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> See, Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Bruno Schulz, "The Comet," in *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, transl. Celina Wieniewska. New York: Penguin, 1977, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Ida Fink, *Odpywający ogród. Opowiadania zebrane*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B. 2002, 277. All the quotations from this edition are translated by Marek Wilczyński and will be marked as with an abbreviation OO in brackets.

As can be guessed from the circumstances described in the text, the time of the events is summer, or more precisely, July of 1939. The impatient mother dismisses Agafia's words as "nonsense," but the neighbor, the partner of holiday entertainments, who for the narrator "was [...] a master and oracle," takes the announcement of the apocalypse surprisingly seriously: "– 'It would be a pity,' Adalbert suddenly spoke up and then took to dealing cards, but suddenly threw them on the table and, without saying a word, ran away to his house." (OO 279). Exactly one month and four days later, in August, a massive storm and downpour happen, and one of the story's characters casually refers to it as "the end of the world," which the narrator picks up with some relief as the fulfillment of a bad omen. After the storm, however, the landscape has a fantastic, unreal color scheme, associable with the canvases of El Greco: "Thunders were no longer heard, the downpour ceased, only the sky was still illuminated by silent, pale flashes. Streams of yellow water flew down the steep street, the air had a strange, pungent smell and a strange yellow color. Also the sky was gray-yellow, yellow clouds ran across it, yellow trees stood by the roadside. The world had turned yellow." (OO 281) If one remembers that Fink was a writer of the Holocaust and most of her works refer to it in one way or another, this uncommon yellow takes on an almost allegorical dimension, foreshadowing the color of the identifying armbands with the Star of David imposed on Jews shortly thereafter; a sign of death that preceded the "final solution." As it seems, Agafia knows this, or at least something yet to come, best. When, after the storm, the narrator jokingly tries to allay her fears, she responds unconvinced: "– Don't laugh," she replied sternly. – This time [the end of the world - M.W.] passed sideways, but it will still come, it will still come... you will see..."<sup>7</sup> The war was to break out in a dozen days at the latest.

Fink concedes Agafia's point in the short story "The Garden That Floated Away," definitely a sequel to "Mój pierwszy koniec świata." Despite the dominance of the realistic convention of representation, the piece betrays a clear affinity with catastrophic Schulzian imagery, e.g., in the opening paragraph:

Once I saw a garden float away. It was our neighbors garden, just as beautiful and flush as ours, and there were fruit trees growing in it, just as in ours. I saw it flow away, slowly and majestically, into the distance far beyond our reach. That afternoon was warm and peaceful. I was sitting with my sister on the porch steps, and the two gardens – Wojciech's and ours – were right there in front of our eyes. They formed a single garden, for they were not divided by

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<sup>7</sup> Fink, *Odplywający ogród*, 281.

a fence. A fence, we said, would be an intrusion. Only a row of evenly spaced currant bushes stitched the two gardens together.<sup>8</sup>

The setting of both stories is identical. Although there is no Agafia, who has already played her role as Cassandra, there is Wojciech, picking renette apples with his sister, which points to early autumn. Incidentally, Schulz's addressed this particular season twice: in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* ("A Second Autumn") and then in 1938 in *Sygnaly* ("Autumn"). There is indeed no fence in the garden, but the busyness on one side is matched by the stillness on the other. The narrator's father, instead of picking fruit, is immersed in a long conversation with Mrs. Kasinska on a subject still unknown to the reader. In Schulz's "Autumn" there is a departure from the summer resort, and in "The Garden That Floated Away" we find the same motif, though used differently:

I watched so attentively that my eyes began to hurt from watching. The sun ignited little fires on the masts of the trees. How could I have known that this was the signal to set sail? Wojciech's garden, the garden of our childhood friend, suddenly shuddered, swayed, began to pitch and roll, and then slowly, slowly it started to float away like a huge green ocean liner. It sailed away slowly but steadily; the distance between us grew quickly, the garden got smaller and disappeared. It had floated away to an inaccessible distance, far beyond our reach. (ST 13)

Here Fink once again approached the diction of the author of "The Comet," a clear sign of which is a tinge of oneirism. After this *forte*, however, there is an abrupt transition from the world of imagination to the world of history, from fantasy to the present. To the narrator, immersed in a visionary reverie, her sister says reproachfully, "Don't squint like that. When you squint anyone can see right away that you're Jewish." (ST 13) Then the climax of the story comes soon enough: "Father called us to his office, to the animated Mrs. Kasinska, who, once the price was agreed on, promised to make *Kennkarten* for us so we could be saved, so we would not be killed." (ST 14)

The end of the world itself, or rather the end of a particular group of its inhabitants, is described by Fink second-hand in the story "A Scrap of Time." The narrator, again together with her sister, observes from a safe hiding place in the bushes at the top of a hill the course of the "action," perhaps in Zbarazh, only to learn about its finale after the war from a peasant, a chance witness:

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<sup>8</sup> Ida Fink, *A Scrap of Time*, transl. Madeline Levine and Francine Prose. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995, 11. All the following quotations from this edition will be marked with an abbreviation ST in brackets.

The peasant [...] came back after the war and told us everything. It happened just as rumor had it, in a dense, overgrown forest, eight kilometers outside of town, one hour after the trucks left the marketplace. The execution itself did not take long. More time was spent on the preparatory digging of the grave. It took more time to dig the grave beforehand. (ST 10)

Thus, the prediction once brought from the market by Agafia is finally fulfilled, but also, if one accepts the intertextual connection between “Mój pierwszy koniec świata” and “The Comet,” it confirms what Joseph’s brother had heard a little earlier at school and applies to Schulz himself. It did not matter that the “bolide,” an ephemeral object of newspaper interest, went out of fashion. The prophecy was soon authenticated when fashion was replaced by a well-organized program based on the principles of the Nazi race theory and eugenics.

Fink’s laconic realism turns out revelatory here and there, e.g., at the moment of the strange “yellowing” of the world after the rainstorm, an allegory that gains meaning when placed in a historical context or, more precisely, in the context of a disaster attested by history. As Walter Benjamin writes in his study of the Baroque *Trauerspiel* after the disaster of the Thirty Years’ War in Germany: “When, as is the case in the *Trauerspiel*, history becomes part of the setting, it does so as script. The word ‘history’ stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience.”<sup>9</sup> This is how on the face of the world in August 1939 and later on the physiognomy of the garden on the eve of the Shoah, is written the history of Eves renewed exile from paradise, along with the Adams and their offspring. Moreover, Fink’s poetics surprisingly corresponds to an observation quoted by Benjamin, referring to the local Baroque iconography:

It has been quite correctly observed, by Hausenstein, that, in in paintings of apotheoses the foreground is generally treated with exaggerated realism, so as to be able to show the remoter, visionary elements more reliably. The attempt to gather all the worldly events into the graphic foreground is not undertaken only to heighten the tension between immanence and transcendence, but also to secure for the latter the greatest conceivable rigour, exclusiveness and inexorability.<sup>10</sup>

In Fink’s case, of course, “rigour, exclusiveness and inexorability” have nothing to do with transcendence, but their impact, future or present, lends a certain

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, transl. John Osborne. London – New York: Verso, 1985, 177.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, 183.

excess of meaning to the seemingly elementary descriptions of a familiar world. As it turns out, the narrator's gaze is in fact a melancholic gaze, under which things take on new meanings:

If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense. In his hands the object becomes something different; through it he speaks of something different and for him it becomes a key to the hidden knowledge; and he reveres it as the emblem of this.<sup>11</sup>

Again: in the case of Fink, "hidden knowledge" is the knowledge of the fate of the Jews in Galicia after the Nazis invaded it in June 1941. In Schulz's fiction, we find a certain symbolism, in relation to which Fink's stories can function as a kind of pragmatic, conditioning filter for reception.

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In Schulz's "Second Autumn," the father delivers a fantastic apotheosis of this season around the town as a wandering theater:

That second autumn of our province is nothing but a sick mirage projected through an expanse of radiation into our sky by the dying, shut-in beauty in our museums. Autumn is a great touring show, poetically deceptive, an enormous purple-skinned onion disclosing ever new panoramas under each of its skins. No center can ever be reached. Behind each wing that is moved and stored away new and radiant scenes open up, true and alive for a moment until you realize that they are made of cardboard. All perspectives are painted, all the panoramas made of board and only the smell is authentic, the smell of wilting scenery, the smell of theatrical dressing rooms, redolent of greasepaint and scent. And at dusk there is great disorder and chaos in the wings, a pileup of discarded costumes, among which you can wade endlessly as if through yellowed fallen leaves. There is a great confusion: everybody is pulling at the curtain robes, and the sky, a great autumnal sky hangs in tatters and is filled with the screeching of pulleys. And there is an atmosphere of feverish haste,

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, 183-184.

of belated carnival, a ballroom about to empty in the small hours, a panic of masked people who cannot find their real clothes.<sup>12</sup>

In the short story “Cyrk” [Circus] by another Polish resident of pre-war Galicia, Zygmunt Haupt, who, though a native of Podolia, spent quite a few years in Zhovkva and Lviv, the spectacle of the “second autumn” from the Drohobych area is replaced in September 1939 by a fairground drama, closely related to the itinerant, and therefore highly shoddy theater:

The circus was a third-rate traveling circus: carts painted in crawling, bright colors, with big ‘CIRCUS’ signs, curtains in the windows, with a few miserable animals in smelly cages, even the skin of the old elephant seemed worn out like the leather of an old suitcase, the washed and greased faces of the clowns and their most trivial, fairground numbers, the clavicles of the equestriennes sticking out through the skin and the tattered leotards of the acrobats. [...] There was also a display of acrobatic riding on bicycles, velocipedes, tricycles, on caricatures of wheels, on elliptical wheels, on fantastic combinations of wheels, on their rims describing some evolutions, and epicycles, monsters, masquerades, clowns, pierrots, butterflies, strange creatures, bears, monkeys, birds, insects, giraffes, whatever teratology has in store, some fantasies like from Bruegel’s paintings or the Temptations of St. Anthony, harpies, stomach-people and candlestick people, leopard snakes and utter fantasies unlike anything else, and this crowd of ghouls and freaks went around in a mad carousel, *merry-go-round*, a whirlwind, a malstroem of absurdity under cascades of light, as if the world from *Alice in Wonderland* had suddenly filled the miserable tent of a provincial circus. And in the morning I was woken up by an aide and called out to me: ‘Carry out 390! Help me, for God’s sake, phone the batteries.’<sup>13</sup>

Haupt’s “Cyrk,” with its bravura stylistic enumeration, not far from Schulz’s enumeration in terms of atmosphere, refers to the 1939 September campaign, in which the author took part as an artillery officer, and, as in Fink’s fiction, the pendulum of the representational convention swings in it either in the direction of the fantastic or in that of a reporter’s testimony of combat. The campaign soon came to an end on the border with Hungary, which is described by the writer in the story titled “Polonez na pożegnanie ojczyzny. Opowiadanie ułana

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<sup>12</sup> Schulz, 221-222.

<sup>13</sup> Zygmunt Haupt, “Cyrk,” in *Baskijski diabeł. Opowiadania i reportaże*, ed. Aleksander Madyda, Wołowiec: Czarne, 2016, 527-528. All the following quotations from this edition will be marked with an abbreviation BD in brackets.

Czuchnowskiego” [Farewell to the Fatherland (A Story by Uhlan Czuchnowski)], where the poetics of the accumulation of objects is exemplified in a paragraph that is as concise as it is decidedly more melancholy:

In Rachov a huge encampment of people, equipment, burning piles of rifles, thrown in a heap, lying strewn in the ditches are sacks of coffee, crates of canned goods, anti-gas masks are crumbling, defunct cars, a motor-pump with a huge inscription entertains the eye with its cheerful color and brass parts: “Fire Brigade of the City of Bydgoszcz.” (BD 534)

For a variety of reasons – ethnic, fortuitous – for Haupt the war was a different kind of disaster than for Schulz or Fink. With his unit, the writer crossed the Hungarian border and then went successively to the Polish army in France and Great Britain, eventually marrying an American woman and settling in New Orleans. In 1975 he died in the United States. After September 19, 1939, Haupt was not allowed to return to Galicia or Podolia, so he became a classic exile – an emigrant who, through literature, tried to recreate the lost space of his “small homeland” in his memory and imagination. One of the most successful results of this effort is the long short story “Lutnia” [Lute], entirely focused on the town of Zhovkva and its founder by that name, Crown Field Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski. The final part of the story, situated on the borderlines between fiction, memoir, and essay, is a return to Haupt’s last visit to Zhovkva a few days before leaving Poland forever:

The turn of the war took me unexpectedly as far as the town limits of Zhovkva. [...] It was strange to find myself there in such unusual circumstances, but there was little time to wonder. It was necessary to find positions for the battery, dig in the cannons and finally rest. It was only possible to sleep at the battery, so I couldn’t go to the parents’ house, where I had not been for a long time. But since it was just below the castle, at a spare moment I went there to wander around a bit [...]. (BD 263-264)

The narrator walks through the deserted former Sobieski castle, turned into a municipal office and archive, visits the once hard-to-reach rooms of officials, and finally arrives at the library warehouse:

On the shelves, along the walls, on the floor, under the vault, piles of volumes, books are piled up. No one has stepped here for years, for decades, everything covered with a virgin layer of dust, on which no finger wanders. These books lie dormant in some kind of daydream, the leather on the spines of the volumes is peeling, the bindings are ruined, the letters are gilded, blackened and concave: antique, italics, the parchment shines brightly with its membrane



all the way to transparency, the paper has yellowed, but it's still a great paper of those times, it has crumbled at the edges, but it holds on. Volumes, folios, laboriously stitched copybooks, folders from which the contents are spilling out. (BD 264)

Immediately afterwards, the reader is presented with an enumeration of the chapters of the randomly opened book, *Skład abo Skarbek znakomomitych Sekretów Oekonomii Ziemiańskiej*, a real *tour de force* of Old Polish, but what seems really important, decisive at this point, is the author's awareness that the library, forgotten by all, is essentially a figure of disaster.

That Haupt wrote his stories *ex post*, on the other side of the Atlantic, is evidenced by another reminiscence of the same, last stop in Zhovkva included in the story "O Stefci, Chaimie Immerglücku i o scytyjskich bransoletkach" [On Stefcia, Chaim Immerglück, and the Scythian Bracelets] from the volume *Pierścień z papieru*, published in 1963 with Jerzy Giedroyc in Paris. There the writer, or rather his *porte-parole*, meets in the Zhovkva market square, modeled on the market square in Zamosc, an acquaintance, the owner of a local ironmonger's store, Chaim Immerglück, about whom, eighteen years after the war, everything is more or less well known: the name – *immer Glück*, in German "always lucky" – sounds ironic, because Chaim probably did not turn out to be a lucky man, gassed in the nearby extermination camp at Belzec, or shot together with Jews from Lviv in the Janow Forest. The narrator describes the meeting as follows:

He met me with some kind of gleam of understanding in his eyes. His acceptance of me, coming down with this war, to some extent I brought this war here with me, I was one of its co-makers, its gods. [...] It seemed to me as if he suddenly realized that we were taking part in a carnival, that he recognized me in disguise, that he understood, that he had no grudge against me, that it was even kind of comical: me in this disguise, with a steel helmet on my head and a bunch of hand grenades hooked to my belt, with a layer of dust on my shoes, on the flaps of my pockets, on my cheeks, on my nose, up to my eyebrows. (BD 48)

Suddenly, for a few September days on the threshold of this really possible "third autumn," the "great wardrobe" and "lipstick and incense" from Schulz's "Second Autumn" served as props in another performance, in which makeup is done not with powder but with dust, and blood is real, instead of the raspberry juice given by the father to the firemen. Moments later, in the eyes of Second Lieutenant Haupt, the transformation of a familiar world under the influence of new circumstances is finally completed:

Maybe the glimmer of understanding in Chaim Immerglück's eyes is an illusion, or maybe it's meant to contrast, to say that nothing is important anymore. That the people I see in the marketplace; a gathering of dull faces, their breath mixed with the air – and no matter if I bring them bad or good news, there is no appeal for them. They are as impersonal as the scrabbling, scurrying of rats behind the wall of the house, the impersonal and lifeless sloshing of water crashing against the stones of the stream, the creaking of branches bent by a gust of wind . (BD 48-49)

This process culminates when Zhovkva freezes under the suddenly alien gaze of its recent inhabitant into an emblem, like a posthumous mask of the city and its war-traumatized community:

As I walk slowly, slowly through the streets of the town, it's as if I don't want to muddle what is here, what I no longer belong to. Although there are some people around, it seems empty. Some of these people are like flies on the face of a dead person. They swoop up with a buzz from the corners of the mouth, from the corners of the eyelids and immediately sit back down, "*mooches*" on the powdered face, swoop up and sit down. (BD 49)

The stories "Lutnia" and "O Stefci, Chaimie Immerglücku i o scytyjskich bransoletkach" are records of the world just before the catastrophe, made afterwards with full knowledge of its consequences. Perhaps coincidentally, Haupt, immersed in the melancholy of the emigrant, used in them tricks of Baroque provenance – as Benjamin wrote, "the only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory."<sup>14</sup> Hence, in "Lutnia", the image of the library appears as a vestige of "the baroque ideal of knowledge: the process of storing to which the vast libraries are a monument."<sup>15</sup> Benjamin also points out that "in the *Trauerspiel* of the seventeenth century, the corpse becomes quite simply the pre-eminent emblematic property."<sup>16</sup> This is also the case in the story of the farewell of Zhovkva which transforms into a figure of a corpse, an anticipation and at the same time an epitaph for the many corpses – Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, German, Russian – that were soon to replace most of the town's hitherto living population. Thus, things that had served the living for work or entertainment were abandoned and accumulated in useless piles or lay scattered disorderly, at best to form the basis of calculations, inventories, and registers.

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, 185.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, 184.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, 218.

Inventories in imagination, carried out at a distance in time and space by nostalgia-driven survivors.

The last writer on the agenda is Leopold Buczkowski, born in Nakwasa in Podolia. Before the war, he lived in Podkamien near Brody, on the border of Galicia and Volhynia, and then, from mid-1943, in Warsaw and nearby Konstancin. Buczkowski's first three novels, *Wertepy*, written in the 1930s and published in 1947 (an excerpt appeared in 1937 in *Sygnaty*), 1954's *Black Torrent* [*Czarny potok*], and *Dorycki krużganek* [Doric Cloister], published three years later, refer to Galicia shortly before or during World War II.<sup>17</sup> The post-war novels tell in a peculiar and twisted way about the fate of groups of armed Jews trying to survive the German occupation in forest concealment and occasionally, in cases of absolute necessity, taking up arms against regular and auxiliary enemy formations, or liquidating dangerous informers. A parallel thread in *Dorycki krużganek* is Wehrmacht Major Osnabrick's absurd attempt at a cinematic reconstruction of life in pre-war Brody, where Jews were the largest ethnic group. Trouble is, the Jews are almost gone, having been displaced and exterminated, and the only source of information about the past remains old Cukier, showering the major with a multitude of details that do not add up to any meaningful whole. Jerzy Stempowski, who reviewed Buczkowski's novel in *Kultura*, defended the writer against repeated accusations that his fiction was incomprehensible:

His vision of the drowning world of Brody is supposed to be first of all true, authentic, direct. Why should the reader understand me? I don't understand any of it myself. I stand like St. John on the island of Patmos and see. Whoever is looking for things that are clear and understandable, let him read Molière. (transl. Marek Wilczyński)<sup>18</sup>

The remedy for the magnitude and incomprehensibility of the unfolding catastrophe turns out to be, as in Haupt's work, enumeration, which sometimes reaches a truly Schulzian level of verbal mastery:

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<sup>17</sup> Arkadiusz Kalin distinguishes three basic approaches of critics to Buczkowski's fiction: mimetic, epistemological, and formal, united by the common denominator of "chaos." See A. Kalin, "Problem spójności prozy Leopolda Buczkowskiego", in Sławomir Buryła, Agnieszka Karpowicz, Radosław Sioma (eds.), *...zimą bywa się pisarzem... O Leopold Buczkowskim*. Cracow: Universitas, 2008, 27-59. In the present essay I have adopted, following Jerzy Stempowski, the mimetic perspective, in which Buczkowski's wartime novels are treated as testimonies of a historical catastrophe.

<sup>18</sup> Jerzy Stempowski, "Kaprysy kosmiczne i ich konsekwencje literackie. Trzy powieści Leopolda Buczkowskiego", in *Klimat życia i klimat literatury 1948-1967*, ed. Jerzy Timoszewicz. Warsaw: Więź, 2001, 147-148.

[...] brought out were foragers, shepherds, milkmaids, witches, innkeepers, barbers, thieves in spectacles, circus performers with hernias, grumblers, retired officers with spurs and reeds in their hands, jockeys, birders, hucksters, slime men, toll collectors, wiremen with upturned mandibles, factotums, love letter scribblers, widows, gaudy organists, weather heralds, and old men. A special platoon led out of town hunting dogs, law clerks in count's clothes, obese and infertile women, land commissioners, councilors in brand-new underwear, firemen band conductors, dance teachers, flunkies, enforcers, sharps, proxies, beer salesmen, cologne sprays in movie theaters, carousel owners, caretakers of baths, junk traders, cutters from the theater, gravediggers, taxidermists, custodians, upholsterers, stucco makers, jewelers, umbrella makers, the last two organ grinders, breeders of lice for a certain doctor, panders, butlers, waiters, porters, washerwomen, embroiderers, photographers, glassblowers, stove makers, furriers, dependents, and *schadchens*. (transl. Marek Wilczyński)<sup>19</sup>

All of them probably faced the same fate that befell the orchestra playing to the workers who “in the spring of the year forty-three” were building the Southern Road: “The orchestra, having played the last eroica to the workers’ battalions, slouched in procession to the quarries to be shot.”<sup>20</sup> (transl. MW) The tension between this laconic sentence and the rampant polyphony of the list of “led out” (it goes on even longer in the text) reflects the basic dilemma of Holocaust literature, or more broadly, the literature of total catastrophe: how to represent an event whose simplest verbal form is “all were killed.” What does “all” actually mean? How to escape the leveling power of such a generalization?

In *Dorycki krużganek*, Buczkowski reverses the procedure of negative, apophatic theology applied in the first century A.D. by Pseudo-Dionysius in the famous one-page fifth chapter of his treatise “On Mystical Theology.”<sup>21</sup> This chapter, a single, densely packed page, deals with the impossibility of defining the essence of God by means of affirmative terms, turned by the author into a series of negations. Since the enumeration of everything that God is not allows one to get as close as possible to what He is, then perhaps a complete list of those who were expelled from Brody and murdered will allow one to fill in the meaning of the word “all”? In this way, it may be possible to approach the experience of the catastrophe (Shoah) as a negation of experience, since, as Maurice Blanchot

<sup>19</sup> Leopold Buczkowski, *Dorycki krużganek*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977, 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> Buczkowski, 7.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://esoteric.msu.edu/Volumell/MysticalTheology.html>

writes in *L'Écriture du désastre*, it is a *de facto* “excess” not usable, as is usual with experience, in later life:

An experience that is not a lived event and that does not engage the presence of present is already non-experience [...]. It is just an excess of experience, and affirmative though it be, in this excess no experience occurs; it cannot posit itself in the instant and find therein repose [...] or bestow itself lavishly in some point of incandescence: it marks only the exclusion of such a point. We feel that there cannot be any experience of the disaster, even if we were to understand disaster to be the ultimate experience. This is one of its features: it impoverishes all experience, withdraws from experience all authenticity. It keeps its vigil only when night watches without watching over anything.<sup>22</sup>

Therein lies perhaps the difference between Schulz’s enumerations – for example, the one in “A Second Autumn” – and those of Haupt or Buczkowski. In Schulz’s case, the dynamic of the process and the multiplicity of details are governed by metaphor, the embodied life force which transforms itself into power, even if it is a power at its decline. The cases of Buczkowski and Haupt are different: their equally rich, and sometimes even overwhelming enumerations are metonymic, based on adjacency without energy necessary to bring together individual pieces of the puzzle, often with no progression, unless it is progression toward imminent death. However, the speeding Schulzian machinery irrevocably loses momentum, freezes – its feverish productivity ends in a static *tableau*, a kind of graveyard. And yet without this machinery “Lutnia,” “O Stefci, Chaimie Immerglücku i o scytyjskich bransoletkach” or *Dorycki krużganek* might not have come into being, or at least they would have been quite different. Without Schulz, perhaps some stories by Ida Fink might have also been written differently.

Polish Galician fiction, a phenomenon of the interwar period and the three or so decades after World War II, includes, of course, not only the work of the four writers mentioned above, but also the output of other authors who can hardly be linked to Schulz in terms of both poetics and motifs that foreshadow or attest to catastrophe. To the same geocultural circle belonged Julian Strykowski, born in Stryj, after the war in Poland; Andrzej Chciuk, a native of Drohobych, after the war in exile in Australia; Herminia Naglerowa, who came from Zaliska near Brody, after the war in London; Andrzej Stojowski from Lviv, or the infamous Andrzej Kuśniewicz from Kowienice near Sambor, both of them living in Poland after the war. Strykowski described in a cycle of four novels the crisis of

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<sup>22</sup> Maurice. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, transl. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 50-51.

the traditional Jewish community in Galicia within the framework of a realistic convention of representation, while in two others presented the autobiography of a devout and later disillusioned communist. Chciuk drew in his two non-fiction memoirs a rather idyllic picture of Lviv and Drohobych, although, which is rare in Polish Galician literature, Ukrainians are portrayed there in greater numbers than in anywhere else. Naglerowa wrote about Galicia before the war, while her postwar short stories and novels dealt mainly with the experiences of Poles in Soviet prisons and Siberia. Stojowski and Kuśnewicz, each in his own way, gave expression to stylized nostalgia.<sup>23</sup> It may be worth writing a monograph on this trend, especially since the relatively recent developments in literary studies offer a methodological and conceptual frame of reference for it.

*Translated from Polish by Marek Wilczyński*

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**23** An attempt to describe the Galician trend in postwar Polish fiction was made by Ewa Wiegandt in her monograph *Austria felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM), published in 1988 (second edition 1997). Unfortunately, due to state censorship, it lacked a discussion of the works of émigré writers, and moreover, the author was mainly interested in the mythologization of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The merit of Wiegandt's study is the thesis put forward in the conclusion about the influence of Schulz's poetics on postwar writers.