

Zofia Ziemann: *It's a writer's book.* English-language authors reading Schulz (a great deal)

On the back cover of Madeline G. Levine's new English translation of Schulz's fiction, Stanley Bill's endorsement reads: "Her fidelity to the original text ensures that her translation will make a significant contribution to the reception of Bruno Schulz in English".¹ While this is probably true with regard to the academic readership, it is harder to predict the popularity of Levine's translation among 'ordinary' readers, not necessarily interested in recommendations by Schulz scholars.² The history of literary translation provides ample evidence that the readers' favours are uncertain and that faithfulness does not always pay off. Having read Levine's translation, I keep my fingers crossed for its success; may the appreciation of a wide readership make up for its thorny road to publication.³ The first press reviews⁴ have been very positive, although surprisingly scarce so far; it almost seems as though Levine's translation, long awaited by critics of

1 B. Schulz, *Collected Stories*, trans. M. G. Levine, Evanston, Illinois 2018. [Author's note 2024: A yet newer translation came out in 2022, by Stanley Bill himself: *Nocturnal Apparitions: Essential Stories* (Pushkin Press). This article was originally published in Polish in 2018, presenting the results of the research project "Bruno Schulz in English 1958–2016: A comparative analysis of translations, their history and reception" (National Science Centre; 2014/15/N/HS2/03913). I would like to use this opportunity to thank my wonderful students, Kacper Cymbor and Karol Krzaczyński, for their editorial assistance in preparing this slightly altered and abridged English version.]

2 This is not to say that they are insensitive to nuances of translation – as demonstrated by a recent online discussion comparing Celina Wieniewska's and John Curran Davis's versions (<http://www.ligotti.net/showthread.php?p=145455>), it is not only Schulz scholars or translation researchers who are prepared to study translations in detail and argue about their quality (I would like to thank Branislava Stojanović for sharing this link in her "Bruno Schulz" Facebook profile).

3 The process of finding a publisher and finalizing the publication took twice as long as the actual translation work, which Levine had completed in early 2014. I discuss the prolonged "prenatal life" of this text from a translation studies perspective in the article "Extratextual Factors Shaping Preconceptions about Retranslation: Bruno Schulz in English," in: *Perspectives on Retranslation: Ideology Paratexts, Methods*, ed. Ö. Berk Albachten, Ş. Tahir Gürçağlar, New York – London 2018, pp. 87–103.

4 R. Franklin, "Review of Bruno Schulz's „Collected Stories”: Return to the Street of Crocodiles," *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/review-of-bruno-schulzs-collected-stories-return-to-the-street-of-crocodiles-1521144828> (accessed: 15/3/2018); B. Paloff, "Real fantasist: A new translation of a Polish giant," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4/4/2018, p. 16; R. Looby, "Beyond the Laws," *Dublin Review of Books*, <http://www.drb.ie/essays/beyond-the-laws> (accessed: 1/7/2018).

Celina Wieniewska's old version and enjoying the patronage of the Polish Book Institute, was more widely publicized prior to publication. Either way, Levine's work will certainly be discussed in *Schulz//Forum* and elsewhere, as it is doubly important: as a literary text in its own right – I agree with Bill that this translation is not only “courageous” (or even risky, precisely in its fidelity to Schulz's original), but also “impressive” – and as a testimony to and basis for the next stage of the reception of Schulz in English.

Before looking for signs of this new quality in the English-language reception of Schulz's fiction, however, let us consider whether we have a full picture of its development to date. There seems to have been no systematic research, either in Poland or abroad, into the reception of Schulz in English; the few articles on the subject concentrate on the American scholarly contexts.⁵ Meanwhile, general-interest press, ordinary newspapers – whose analysis, while still laborious, is infinitely easier to carry out today than in the past, thanks to electronic databases – can reveal arguably relevant facts unknown to Schulz scholars. Example: In 1996, in the early days of the commercial use of the Internet, Steve G. Steinberg of *Wired* magazine wrote in his column “Innovations” in *Los Angeles Times*: “Search engines such as Alta Vista (<http://www.altavista.digital.com>) or Deja News (<http://www.dejanews.com>) allow users to find documents and messages that contain specific keywords. That's wonderful in some cases – if you're, say, just looking for messages about the writer Bruno Schulz. But it's not much help if you're interested in more general topics that can't be described with just a few words.”⁶ Now, isn't *that* wonderful? Schulz's name spontaneously mentioned in passing in a context that has nothing to do with literature (or Polish culture, or Jewish culture) in many ways constitutes a more authentic reception testimony – evidence that he left a trace in the minds of English-speaking readers – than an academic article in *The Polish Review* or *Slavic and East European Journal*. Newspaper archives are a treasure trove; it is time that we, as researchers, use them more widely than ‘only’ in reconstructing Schulz's biography and his early reception in Poland.

5 T. Robertson, “Recepcja Schulza w Ameryce. Wstępne rozpoznanie,” trans. M. Wacławek Kresy 13/1993, pp. 39–43; R. E. Brown, “Bruno Schulz Bibliography,” *The Polish Review* 39 (2)/1994, pp. 231–253; K. Kaszorek, “‘Polish Kafka’ w Ameryce, czyli co o Schulzu pisali pierwsi amerykańscy badacze jego twórczości,” *Schulz//Forum* 9/2017, pp. 56–66. The only exception I am aware of is David A. Goldfarb's overview of Schulzian inspirations in English-language writers (Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth, Salman Rushdie, Nicole Krauss, and Jonathan Safran Foer): “Appropriations of Bruno Schulz,” *Jewish Quarterly* 58(2)/2011, pp. 42–47 (updated 21/8/2014), <https://jewishquarterly.org/2011/06/appropriations-of-bruno-schulz/> (accessed: 14/6/2011).

6 “Advances Offer Hope for Truly Useful Filters,” *LA Times*, 25/3/1996, p. D6.

As an appendix to my doctoral dissertation,⁷ I have compiled an annotated bibliography of over four hundred press articles in English that mention “Bruno Schulz”, dating from 1963 to 2018. Their analysis revealed some interesting regularities, including a surprisingly large representation of artists – mainly writers and poets, but also film and theatre makers, musicians, painters, and photographers – among the most ardent admirers of Schulz. Their fascination with his work has remained virtually unknown; only a select few have been commonly associated with Schulz. Isaac Bashevis Singer, Philip Roth, and Cynthia Ozick as the Jewish-American patrons of his transatlantic career in the 1970s and 80s (perhaps also John Updike as the author of the paratexts to English-language editions), the Quay Brothers as the authors of the acclaimed 1986 film animation *The Street of Crocodiles* (to a lesser extent, London’s Théâtre de Complicité with its award-winning theatre adaptation from 1992), J.M. Coetzee as the author of an influential essay on Schulz from 2003,⁸ and Jonathan Safran Foer as the author of *Tree of Codes*, a literary-artistic homage from 2010 – and that would be it. To expand this short list, in what follows, I will present a chronological outline of the reception of Schulz’s fiction by English-speaking writers⁹, briefly mentioning household names and focusing on authors who have not been discussed in this context.

The presence of writers among the reviewers of Schulz’s fiction in English translation is, of course, related to the practice of combining creative writing with literary criticism: press reviews often promote not only the books they discuss, but also the reviewer’s own newly published or forthcoming work (in a note along the lines of “[Name of reviewer] is the author of [book title]”). The first edition of *The Cinnamon Shops and Other Stories* (Celina Wieniewska’s translation of *Sklepy cynamonowe*), published in the UK in 1963¹⁰, was reviewed for *The Spectator* by the postmodern writer B. S. Johnson (1933–1973).¹¹ The review reflects his

⁷ *Bruno Schulz w języku angielskim 1958–2018. Historia i recepcja przekładów z elementami analizy porównawczej* [Bruno Schulz in English 1958–2018: Translation History and Reception with Elements of Comparative Analysis], supervisor: Prof. Marta Gibińska-Marzec, Jagiellonian University 2019 (unpublished thesis [defended 2020 – author’s note 2024]). The present article draws on the chapter discussing the reception of Wieniewska’s translation.

⁸ I have discussed this text in: “Dobry zły przekład. O angielskim Schulzu Celiny Wieniewskiej” (*Schulz/Forum* 9, 2017, pp. 50–51) and “The Inner and Outer Workings of Translation Reception: Coetzee on (Wieniewska’s) Schulz,” in: *Travelling Texts*, ed. B. Kucała, R. Kusek, Frankfurt am Main 2014, pp. 79–91).

⁹ To even just cite the names of representatives of other arts who expressed appreciation for Schulz in reviews, interviews, or through intertextual references in their own works would exceed the limits of a single article, hence the narrowing-down to authors of various literary genres.

¹⁰ The book appeared in the same year in the US under the changed title *The Street of Crocodiles*, which has been reproduced in all subsequent editions of this translation both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

¹¹ Life dates have been provided throughout this text as a brief indicator of generational affiliation, particularly useful with lesser-known authors.

interest in literary form, praising *The Cinnamon Shops* as “a beautifully shaped collection of short stories, an organic whole which for form alone is a great pleasure to read”; Johnson calls the author “one of the finest writers of the century in this notoriously difficult form” and notes that his writing, unlike Kafka’s, to whom Schulz is often compared, is characterized by lyricism.¹² Schulz’s stories were also praised upon publication by the writer, poet, and philosopher Kathleen Nott (1905–1999), who in 1963 had three novels and three volumes of poetry to her credit. She emphasized his “painter’s eye” and “wonderful dramatisations of inanimate or non-human nature”.¹³

As regards the US premiere of Schulz’s fiction, one of its first enthusiasts was Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991), who had not come across it as Icek Hersz Zynger (pen name: Warszawski) in 1930s Poland, but only after emigrating, through Wieniewska’s translation. His extensive review of *The Street of Crocodiles* first appeared in Yiddish (in New York’s סטרעוואָרד [The Forward]), and then, slightly abridged and modified, in English.¹⁴ Singer, who particularly appreciated Schulz’s humour and sense of parody, would continue to promote the fiction of his fellow Polish Jew for the next two decades.

While there is no reason to doubt that Johnson, Nott, and Singer had a genuine appreciation for Schulz, they wrote their reviews in the professional capacity of literary critics, possibly upon commission, and, in any case, for publication. An even more telling trace of the early reception of Schulz in English comes from Ian McEwan (b. 1948). An interview from 2010, promoting his latest novel, informs: “In 1967 McEwan went to the University of Sussex to read English. There, an innovative course saw him exposed to a new road map of the modern European mind that led from Virgil and Dante through to Kafka and Bruno Schulz.”¹⁵ This brief mention is nevertheless significant: the Polish author must have made an impression McEwan if his name was remembered, alongside unquestionable European classics, after more than four decades.

Despite positive reviews in both the UK and the US (apart from the above-listed, by writers, there were many more) and the fact that, if we trust McEwan’s memory, *The Cinnamon Shops* was included in at least one European literature syllabus only a few years after publication, the early reception of Schulz in English can be described as dawdling or indeed dormant – there was little going on in this regard for a dozen years or so. This changed radically when Schulz was

¹² “Short Stories from Four Countries,” *The Spectator*, 29/3/1963, p. 30.

¹³ “New (Translated) Novels,” *The Encounter*, No. 116, May 1963, p. 88–90.

¹⁴ “Burlesquing life with father,” *Herald Tribune* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 22/12/1963.

¹⁵ N. Wroe, “Ian McEwan: ‘It’s good to get your hands dirty a bit,’” *The Guardian*, 6/3/2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/06/ian-mcewan-solar> (accessed: 23/3/2018). The article was reprinted by *The Sydney Morning Herald*; I am mentioning this to signal the global reach of such reception testimonies and, consequently, their importance for promoting Schulz.

discovered by another writer, and thus re-discovered for America and for the English-speaking world. Philip Roth (1933–2018) learnt about Schulz in 1974 on his visit to Prague; he made friends with Czech dissident writers, who introduced him to the literature of Central and Eastern Europe. The following year, he launched his popular publishing series “Writers from the Other Europe” at Penguin. Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles* was reissued within it in 1977. Had Roth’s endorsement not gone beyond this publishing initiative, he would still have been Schulz’s most important (i.e., successful) promoter in the history of his reception in English. But Roth’s fascination was lasting; he referred to Schulz on many occasions, and more than four decades after first reading *The Street of Crocodiles*, he listed it (as the only title from his the seventeen-volume publishing series) among fifteen most important books of his life.¹⁶

The ‘second premiere’ of Schulz’s fiction in English, arranged by Roth, met with a much wider response than the first, from 1963. *The Street of Crocodiles* was reviewed by Cynthia Ozick (b. 1928) in *The New York Times Book Review*.¹⁷ In her sophisticated, rather dark interpretation, Ozick compared him to Kafka, Isaac Babel, and Singer, reinforcing the paradigm established by Singer and dominant in the US reception to this day: Schulz as primarily a representative of the Jewish literary tradition. This does not mean, however, that his work was not discussed in other contexts. Writing for *The New York Review of Books*, the English author and critic V. S. Pritchett (1900–1997) followed Singer in praising Schulz’s “comic genius”, adding that “the deepest roots of the comic are poetic and even metaphysical”.¹⁸ In the character of Jacob, he saw Quixotic melancholy and an affinity with Uncle Toby from Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

The enthusiastic response to *The Street of Crocodiles* encouraged publishers to proceed with the second volume of Schulz’s stories. In 1978, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, also translated by Wieniewska, was published by Walker & Co. As early as August of that year, Susan Sontag (1933–2004) included “Hourglass or The Book” in “An Ideal Story Anthology” envisioned in her journal.¹⁹ Singer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1978, ultimately reinforced Schulz’s link with the author of *The Trial* by publishing on the front

16 T. Zax, “At His Library in Newark, Philip Roth Names 15 of His Favorite Books”, *The Forward*, <https://for-ward.com/culture/352704/at-his-library-in-newark-philip-roth-names-15-of-his-favorite-books/> (accessed: 26/10/2016).

17 “The Street of Crocodiles,” *The New York Times Book Review*, 22/2/1977, p. 2. The same issue features Roth’s interview with Singer about Schulz.

18 “Comic Genius,” *The New York Review of Books*, 4/4/1977, pp. 6–8.

19 S. Sontag, *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks, 1964–1980*, ed. D. Rieff, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2012 (journal entry: 28/8/1978).

page of the *NYTBR* a long review titled “A Polish Franz Kafka”.²⁰ The following year, *Sanatorium* came out in Roth’s “Writers from the Other Europe” series, with an introduction by John Updike (1932–2009). Full of praise and further literary references (Borges, Beckett, Blake), Updike’s text was reprinted on the front page of the *NYTBR* under the title “Bruno Schulz, Hidden Genius”.²¹ Meanwhile in the UK, Angela Carter (1940–1992) reviewed the Hamish Hamilton edition of *Sanatorium*, focusing on Schulz’s affinity with German Romanticism (Novalis and Hoffmann) and concluding that he wrote “like Borges, perhaps, but with heart”.²² Schulz’s name was made in English: the late 1970s marked the beginning of a series of new editions, reprints in magazines and anthologies, reviews, essays, etc., which continues to this day.

In 1981, the Canadian-born American poet, essayist and translator Mark Strand (1943–2014), future US Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner, said that it was after reading Schulz that he first tried his hand at fiction, seeing that prose, too, could be lyrical.²³ In a 1985 interview, the American writer of fiction and poetry Russel Banks (b. 1940) also mentioned Schulz among his literary influences.²⁴ In an article portraying the British novelist Emma Tennant (1937–2017), Schulz’s work is named as the “model” for her 1979 book *Wild Nights*.²⁵

Apart from Sontag’s imaginary anthology, Schulz’s stories were also included in several actual collections, some edited by writers. In 1983, “Father’s Last Escape” was reprinted in the impressive volume (almost 1,000 pages) *Black Water. The Book of Fantastic Literature*²⁶ curated by the Argentine-Canadian essayist, novelist, editor and translator Alberto Manguel (b. 1948), who had also discovered Schulz thanks to Roth’s publishing series. Bringing together fantastic fiction from across the globe – alongside literature originally written in English, Manguel featured a number of translations from Spanish, as well as a handful of texts from Japan, Germany, Austria and Russia – the anthology was quite popular, with several editions in the US (1984), Canada (1984, 1992), and the UK (1994).

The 1980s also brought literary tributes. Roth and Ozick not only publicized Schulz’s work, but also offered creative variations on his biography in their own books: *The Prague Orgy* and *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987), respectively. Roth’s novella, which constitutes the epilogue to his novelistic trilogy about Nathan

²⁰ I. B. Singer, “A Polish Kafka”, *The New York Times Book Review* 9/7/1978, p. 1, 34.

²¹ “Bruno Schulz, Hidden Genius”, *The New York Times Book Review* 9/9/1979, p. 1.

²² “Deadly serious lives,” *The Guardian*, 1/3/1979, p. 16.

²³ “The Education of a Poet: A Conversation between Mark Strand and Nolan Miller,” *The Antioch Review* 1981, vol. 39 (1), p. 114.

²⁴ *The Miami Herald*, 14/4/1985, p. 1E.

²⁵ N. Shakespeare, “Lifting the lid on Britain’s upper crust,” *The Times*, 18/1/1986.

²⁶ “Father’s Last Escape,” trans. C. Wieniewska, in: *Black Water: The Book of Fantastic Literature*, London 1983, p. 430–434.

Zuckerman, follows the narrator on his journey to Prague in search of unpublished manuscripts of a Yiddish writer, who worked as a schoolteacher and was killed by the Gestapo. Ozick's novel is dedicated to Roth – in honour of his literary craft, but perhaps also of his 'discovery' of Schulz for the American reader. It features a long motto from "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies", and the plot abounds in Schulzian references. The protagonist, Lars Andemening, believes himself to be Schulz's son, the fruit of the writer's (historically true) brief visit to Stockholm in 1936. These two books constitute not only testimonies of the reception of Schulz's work in the mid 1970s, showing how deeply impressed the authors were by Wieniewska's translation, but also, especially in the case of Ozick's critically acclaimed novel, important vehicles of his further publicization. *The Messiah of Stockholm* was discussed in dozens of reviews and critical essays; naturally, each such text involved a more or less detailed reference to the novel's literary paragon. In the English-language periodicals consulted within my PhD project, Schulz received more mentions in connection with Ozick's book than in the whole period 1963–1986.²⁷

Not only Jewish-American authors were inspired by Schulz. Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) alluded to "The Street of Crocodiles", "Cinnamon Shops", and "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass", and evoked a generally Schulzian atmosphere (the concept of time, imagery), in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), whose narrator visits the "Street of Parasites": "Physically, too, I felt as if I were in some sort of interregnum, in some timeless zone under the sign of an hourglass in which the sand stood motionless, or a clepsydra whose quicksilver had ceased to flow. . . . I wandered down sausage-festooned streets of bakeries and cinnamon shops, smelling, instead, the sweet scents of meat and pastries and fresh-baked bread, and surrendered myself to the cryptic laws of the town".²⁸ This rather subtle reference was only clear to readers already familiar with Schulz. But even if it did not win Schulz new fans, Rushdie's gesture reinforced Schulz's status as an element, albeit still peripheral, of the constellation of 20th-century world literature. It also showed that Schulz's fiction resonated with the creative imagination of English-speaking authors with very diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds – as will be further evidenced in the 21st century.

The 1990s also brought new anthologies. In 1997, Joyce Carol Oats (b. 1938) included "Father's Last Escape" in *Telling Stories: An Anthology for Writers*, a collection

²⁷ An important role in promoting Schulz around that time, especially in the U.S., was also played by the English translation of David Grossman's novel *See Under: Love* (originally published in Hebrew in 1986, it came out in English in 1989 and enjoyed considerable popularity), with "Bruno Schulz" as the main protagonist of one of the book's four parts. Grossman read Schulz's stories in Hebrew translation (by Uri Orlov, Rachel Kleimann, and Yoram Bronovsky).

²⁸ S. Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, G.K. Hall 1996, p. 564.

intended for her students of creative writing at the University of Windsor and Princeton University.²⁹ Comprising more than seven hundred pages, the anthology followed a thematic and genre rather than chronological arrangement; Schulz's story was featured in the first section, "Miniature Narratives", between texts by Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys. The following year, Alberto Manguel included the same story in his thematic anthology *Fathers and Sons*.³⁰

Schulz's work was mentioned more and more often among various writers' favourite books. In 1995, the American poet James Tate (1943–2015), winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, included *The Street of Crocodiles* as one of the books he would take to a desert island – at number four, as the first work of fiction and the first translation (his top three being poetry collections by John Ashbery, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams).³¹ In 2001, the Dutch-born Australian-Scottish author Michel Faber (b. 1960) listed *The Street of Crocodiles* among his five favourite books, glossed as follows: "Comparable to Kafka, but quirkier, less bleak. Schulz understands dysfunction and madness, but never loses his gentle sense of humour".³² It is worth mentioning the other four items: 1. The King James Bible, 2. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 4. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Old Wardrobe*, 5. Oxford Complete Wordfinder. When I asked Faber (on his visit to Kraków in 2016, as a guest of the Conrad Festival) about his first encounter with Schulz, he didn't have to think twice; he immediately remembered hearing an excerpt of Schulz's fiction on the radio in the 1990s.³³

Faber's example shows that for many English-speaking writers, Schulz was a truly important, memorable discovery. Another such case is the American novelist Rick Moody (b. 1961), who, in two press publications, reminisced about his college years at Brown University, where he first encountered Schulz thanks to Angela Carter³⁴. The most personal account of this kind, which deserves an extensive quotation, came from Nadeem Aslam (b. 1966), a British writer

29 "Father's Last Escape," trans. C. Wieniewska, in: *Telling Stories: An Anthology for Writers*, New York – London 1997 (2nd ed. 1998), pp. 20–23.

30 "Father's Last Escape," trans. C. Wieniewska, in: *Fathers and Sons: An Anthology*, Vancouver 1998, pp. 99–104.

31 *The Republican*, 19/11/1995, p. F1.

32 "My Top 5," *The Herald*, 14/7/2001.

33 Indeed, in April 1995, Simon McBurney, the founder, artistic director, and leading actor of Théâtre de Complicité, London, which staged an adaptation of *The Street of Crocodiles*, read Schulz's stories in four instalments on BBC Radio 3 (<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/radio3/1995-04-03>). Faber told me that he heard Schulz on the ABC; either his memory failed him there, or the Australians (re)broadcast BBC's programme.

34 D. Ryan, "Interview with Rick Moody", *Mississippi Review* 1999, vol. 27 (3), pp. 112–128; R. Moody, "Writers and Mentors", *The Atlantic*, 1/8/2005, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/08/writers-and-mentors/304101/>. As mentioned above, Carter reviewed *Sanatorium* for *The Guardian* in 1979. Teaching at Brown in 1977–1981, she must have decided to share the book with her students.

of Pakistani origin: “One of the most memorable moments of my life is opening this book for the first time. A university student standing in a secondhand bookshop, I remember reading the first page and my heart beginning to beat faster, as though – suddenly, somehow – I was holding a handful of priceless jewels. A minute later I bought the book, for 50 pence, and I still own the copy. Sometimes I think that one aspect of my outlook on life is the direct result of this magnificent book – it’s my love of the physical world; or, more precisely, the physical world transformed through the use of words.”³⁵

To reiterate Schulz’s appeal to writers with different backgrounds, *The Street of Crocodiles* was also listed, as the only book by a non-African author, among the favourite books of the Kenyan writer and LGBT activist Kenneth Binyavanga Wainaina (1971–2019), named by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people of 2014. Wainaina read Schulz in his twenties, presumably as a student of creative writing at the University of East Anglia: “it’s a small book, but it made a huge impression on me. . . . The story is surreal and hard to describe; it’s a writer’s book.”³⁶

The reception of Schulz in English in the 21st century also involved new intertextual references. In *History of Love* (2005), a novel by the American author Nicole Krauss (b. 1973), who has expressed her admiration for Schulz on a number of occasions,³⁷ the lost pre-war manuscript of a book by a Polish Jew who emigrated to New York is found in a Spanish edition and translated into English; fragments of this ‘translation of a translation’ form part of Krauss’ ‘novel within a novel’. *The Street of Crocodiles* is among the 37 volumes of European classics translated into Arabic – secretly, not for publication – by the isolated protagonist of *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014), a National Book

35 N. Aslam, “Book of a lifetime: The Street of Crocodiles, By Bruno Schulz”, *The Independent*, 22/2/2013 (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/book-of-a-lifetime-the-street-of-crocodiles-by-bruno-schulz-8505174.html>). Another version of this story is reported a few weeks earlier in *The Guardian* (Aslam’s increased media presence was related to his new book coming out): “In Britain as a teenager, his self-imposed crash course in a language he could barely speak was to copy out entire novels by hand. He lists Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Gabriel García Márquez’s *Autumn of the Patriarch*, Bruno Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*. ‘That’s how I learned English, looking at the sentences’, he says.” (M. Jaggi, “Nadeem Aslam: a life in writing”, *The Guardian* 26/1/2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/jan/26/nadeem-aslam-life-in-writing>).

36 The other books mentioned are by Guinea’s Camara Laye, Ghana’s Kojo Laing, Nigerian American Teju Cole, and Nigerian Noo Saro-Wiwa. The interview was published in the South African edition of *Oprah Magazine*, unfortunately, it is no longer retrievable under the original link (<http://www.oprahmag.co.za/books/news-interviews/binyavanga-wainaina%27s-favourite-books>). Schulz is also mentioned as one of Wainaina’s favourite authors in an article at *The Huffington Post* (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/28/binyavanga-wainaina-lgbt-rights_n_4677847.html).

37 For example, choosing to read “Father’s Last Escape” on *The New Yorker’s* “Fiction Podcast” in 2012 (<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/nicole-krauss-reads-bruno-schulz>).

Award-nominated novel by the Lebanese-American writer Rabih Allamedine (b. 1959). The English writer Adam Thirlwell (b. 1978), who mentioned Schulz in his erudite book on translation and literature titled *Miss Herbert* (2007), went a step further: for his second, similar patchwork volume, *The Delighted States: A Book of Novels, Romances & Their Unknown Translators...* (2007), in addition to texts by other authors, he actually translated two stories by Schulz based on existing French and English translations, although he eventually used only an excerpt from “August”.

A singular literary tribute to Schulz, widely publicized and better known than the above examples, is *Tree of Codes* (2010)³⁸ – an “erasure book” by Jonathan Safran Foer (b. 1977)³⁹. Foer cut out words and phrases from each page of *The Street of Crocodiles*; the remaining text – all Schulz’s and Wieniewska’s, with Foer’s subtractions, but not additions – forms a new story (or, rather, a poetic image), and the trace of what has been removed is still visible as gaps in the new openwork book. The idea preceded the choice of material; Foer considered using an encyclopaedia or one of his own novels, but ultimately settled on Schulz. He had known and admired Schulz’s fiction for some time; he also authored the foreword to the 2008 Penguin Classics edition of Schulz’s collected stories⁴⁰.

In the twenty-first century, a reception trend already initiated by Manguel’s anthology of fantastic literature has gained momentum, namely the popularity of Schulz among authors of weird fiction. The British writer China Miéville (b. 1972) used a motto from *Cinnamon Shops* – translated by John Curran Davis, not Wieniewska – in his well-received fantasy crime novel *The City and the City* (2009): “Deep inside the town there opens up, so to speak, double streets, doppelganger streets, mendacious and delusive streets.” Two anthologies by American authors also place Schulz in this context: “Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass” was reprinted by Jeff (b. 1968) and Ann VanderMeer (b. 1957) in their anthology *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*,⁴¹ and

38 In 2015, *Tree of Codes* was adapted for ballet as part of the biennial Manchester International Festival. Co-funded by the Paris Opera Ballet and the European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017, among others, the production was prepared by famous artists, with choreography by Wayne McGregor, stage design by Olafur Eliasson, and music by Jamie xx. Despite rather cool reception from critics, its publicity further expanded the range of contexts in which Schulz’s name appeared, potentially attracting the attention of new readers.

39 See K. Szymanska, “Peeping through the Holes of a Translated Palimpsest in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*”, *Contemporary Literature* 2020, vol. 61(1), pp. 32–65.

40 Between 2004 and 2014, Foer was married to Nicole Krauss. Rather than as a piece of literary gossip, I am mentioning this to signal the popularity of Schulz, perhaps inherited from the triumvirate of Singer, Roth, and Ozick, among a new generation of New York’s Jewish-American authors in the 21st century.

41 “Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass,” trans. C. Wieniewska, in: *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, ed. A. & J. VanderMeer, London 2011, p. 248–259.

“The Birds” (in Davis’s translation) in a similar collection by Marjorie Sandor (b. 1957).⁴²

Recent years saw further interviews and newspaper articles with declarations of appreciation for Schulz from authors representing different generations, genres, cultures, and countries. These include the Canadian poet Anne Michaels (b. 1958), the American novelist Nell Zink (b. 1964), the British crime author Harry Bingham (b. 1967), and writers of the younger generation: the British poet Anna Woodford and the American playwright Annie Baker (b. 1981), winner of the Pulitzer Prize.⁴³ Within the timeframe of my research, the most recent intertextual reference, in turn, can be found in Sam Shepard’s (1943–2017) psychological novel *The One Inside* (2017). In one of the short chapters (titled *Sheet of White Paper*, a Schulzian borrowing), the first-person narrator is reading *Sanatorium* in a roadside diner; across two paragraphs, he recounts the author’s story (not entirely accurately). The chapter concludes as follows: “I ordered a short stack of buckwheat flapjacks with extra wild blueberries, a side of bacon, and black coffee. I turned to the chapter called ‘Fathers Last Escape’, where Bruno describes his dead dad as having metamorphosed into a scorpion. ‘A new age began – empty, sober, and joyless, like a sheet of white paper.’ (Schulz, after his sister had been lost at on a voyage to America).”⁴⁴ With or without license (it was the fictitious maid Adela who was rumoured to have thus disappeared), the fact that Schulz made it to that American diner is a clear sign of a properly deep and robust reception of his work in English.

Let me complement this litany of names and references with a piece of anecdotal evidence. In 2014, at the Conrad Festival in Kraków, I translated Paul Auster’s (1948–2024) brief introductions at two screenings of his co-authored films (*Smoke*, *Blue in the Face*). When, by way of small talk, he politely asked about my studies, I recited my somewhat tired phrase: “I am working on a dissertation about English translations of the Polish-Jewish modernist author [a moment of hesitation] Bruno Schulz, perhaps you might have heard of him?” “Of course I know Bruno Schulz!”, Auster replied emphatically, almost as though it was offensive to assume otherwise.

This is not to claim that promoting Schulz in the English-speaking world is no longer necessary, that those who should meet him already have. What I wanted to demonstrate is that our (scholarly/academic) vision of the readers’ reception of

⁴² “The Birds,” trans. J. C. Davis, in: *The Uncanny Reader: Stories from the Shadows*, ed. M. Sandor, New York 2015, p. 165–170.

⁴³ The relevant press mentions have appeared in *The Observer* (22.12/2013), *The New Yorker* (18/5/2015), *The Daily Record* (8/2/2014), *The Journal* (26/2/2013), and *The New York Post* (9/7/2015), respectively.

⁴⁴ S. Shepard, *The One Inside*, New York 2017, p. 28.

Schulz in English (and probably in other languages as well) is rather limited and thus simplified, because we rarely reach for sources in which his name appears only marginally, for example, when various authors promote their own work. It is not true that only Jewish-American writers of the older (Singer, Roth, Ozick) and younger (Foer, Krauss) generations knew and loved his work. He is widely read by authors of high-brow and popular literature across English-speaking countries. Three of the *The Times*' forty greatest British contemporary writers appreciated him.⁴⁵ Some would still say that this is not much, that Schulz deserves to be on a par with Kafka in the canon of world literature. Either way, the evidence amassed above strongly suggests that, thanks to Wieniewska's and, to a lesser extent, John Curran Davis's translations, Levine's new English version can tread on firm ground.

Madeline G. Levine is well aware of the role of Wieniewska's translation: "I fell in love with Bruno Schulz's stories through the undeniable magic of Wieniewska's English version . . . I was not alone. Wieniewska's translations have been enchanting readers ever since they appeared."⁴⁶ Levine deserves great credit not only for her translation endeavour, but also for not trying to promote it by diminishing the achievement of her predecessor. One should hope that the new version, apart from serving English-speaking Schulz scholars as a better, i.e. more faithful, basis for academic interpretations or as designated reading for students in Slavic or CompLit departments, will also, like Wieniewska's, simply delight readers, including the most sensitive and demanding readers: writers.

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⁴⁵ Angela Carter ranks 10th, Rushdie 13th, McEwan 35th (<https://www.the-times.co.uk/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xrf90>).

⁴⁶ M.G. Levine, "Translator's Note", in: B. Schulz, *Collected Stories*, trans. M.G. Levine, Northwestern University Press 2018, p. xiii.