The Afterlife of Schulz, or Schulzology: What Is It Good For?

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Schulz Yesterday and Today
It began with Jerzy Ficowski and Artur Sandauer, after whom many other scholars expanded the perspectives of Schulz studies – among others, Jan Błoński discovered Jewish influences on the Drohobych author’s writings, Władysław Panas followed this trail further, presenting the Kabbalistic dimension of Schulz’s work, Włodzimierz Bolecki examined it in terms of poetics, Jerzy Jarzębski created some synthesizing concepts, and Małgorzata Kito-wska-Łysiak discussed his contribution to the visual arts, to selectively mention some of the most prominent names in twentieth century Schulz studies. And there were also efforts to reveal cultural contexts – Surrealist, Modernist, Romantic, psychoanalytical readings, deconstructionist readings, and more. It thus would appear that an interpretative canon was quick to form, one that has earned the respect of its successors. The true efflorescence of Schulz
studies came, however, with the dawn of the new millennium and was particularly notable at two points marking anniversaries: the years 2002 and 2012, when the 110th and 120th anniversaries of Schulz’s birth and the 60th and 70th anniversaries of his death were observed. Over the last decade or so, a few dozen books devoted to Schulz have been published, including studies by scholars outside Poland: these include monographs, popularizing works for a broad audience, encyclopaedic and contextualizing volumes, special issues of magazines and, of course, anthologies of essays, usually collections resulting from multifarious scholarly symposiums on Schulz (often international conferences), as well as individual articles in all sorts of publications.\footnote{The most complete bibliography, though naturally incomplete given the extraordinary wealth and proliferation of scholarly material, is available at the following website: http://brunoschulz.org/biblio-schulz.html.} During that time, a successor has appeared to take up the biographical research that Ficowski was known for – Wiesław Budzyński, author of three books on Schulz (above all the impressive Schulz pod kluczem [Schulz Under Lock and Key]). Importantly, Schulz’s work and the achievements of Schulz studies are increasingly available in a widely accessible medium – via the Internet. The new millennium has also yielded something incredibly important: an increased familiarity with (if not popularity of) Schulz in his hometown and more broadly in Ukrainian society. The Bruno Schulz Festival that has taken place in Drohobych every two years since 2004 is eminently responsible for this development. Its last meeting, in 2012, was exceptional in terms of its richness – the festival, moved from May to the more congenial September because of the
FIFA European Championships, lasted over a week, with
plays, concerts, readings, and the traditional international
session of discussions on Schulz (from which conference
volumes are compiled and published each time).\(^2\) The festi-
val greeted the debut of a new translation of Schulz’s prose
by Yuri Andrukhovych, a book which has a real chance of
spreading the work’s popularity in Ukraine. Though 2012
was not as widely celebrated in Poland as the previous ma-
jor anniversary\(^3\) (the only event on a par with the festi-
val in Ukraine was the Bruno Schulz Festival in Wrocław
that autumn), a large number of publications on Schulz
have since come out, as recently as within the past several
weeks, that originated then.

Last year also marked another kind of breakthrough year
for the popularity of Schulz’s work, since it finally entered
the public domain, as the rigorous copyright binding for
70 years after the author’s death came to an end. With that
in mind, it is worth mentioning the unconventional form
of tribute to that event that is the hypertextual internet
game \textit{Idol} (Bałwochwał), a newly created poetic pastiche
of Schulz’s labyrinthine prose. Readers can learn more
about this project, created under the aegis of the Ha!art
corporation, at the corporation’s web portal (http://www.
ha.art.pl/schulz/start.html).\(^4\)

\(^2\) The 2014 edition took place 24–30.05.2014; for more details, see: http://schulzfestpol.
blogspot.com.
\(^3\) Though Schulz lost out to Korczak, Kraszewski, Skarga, and Prus for official recognition
from state cultural authorities, the Sejm refrained from completely shaming itself (in the
context of the Ukrainian parliament declaring a Year of Schulz) by making November 2012
the Month of Schulz.
\(^4\) A description of the project in Polish can be found at: http://www.ha.art.pl/prezentacje/29-
projekty/2817-mariusz-pisarski-marcin-bylak-balwochwal-interaktywna-fikcja-sieciowa-
I would like to discuss these last publications (unfortunately merely signalling toward some of them due to lack of space), looking at how far they develop and modify the main interpretative currents in Schulz studies or postulate new ones. It is possible to perceive the crystallization of two phenomena, which are in fact linked to one another. The first is the scholarly status of Schulz studies – studies of the writer’s biography, his work (in literature, criticism, and the visual arts), and its reception extending across several decades, numerous disciplines and many countries. This area of research is so highly developed that for an individual scholar to attempt to grasp the body of existing knowledge in its entirety has become impossible. For that reason, it would be desirable to create scholarly teams and broader initiatives financed in a long-term perspective through research grants (I therefore find the creation of a magazine for Schulz specialists Schulz/Forum to be a highly worthwhile initiative, about which more below). Otherwise, the field faces the dangers of banalization through unconscious repetition of ideas, lack of recognition for important texts (a development which is already occurring, even with entire books by Schulz), and therefore methodological carelessness possibly being used to hide at best overspecialization, at worst simple ignorance. To summarize in a few words, I can cite the title of this essay, Schulzology: What Is It Good For? The other phenomenon relates to the “afterlife” in the title – what is at issue is the Schulz universe becoming a part of popular culture: the author of *The Cinnamon Shops*, often

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na-podstawie-opowiadan-brunona-schulza.html. One of its co-creators, Mariusz Pisarski, writes in greater detail about the undertaking elsewhere in this issue.
linked with Kafka (also in terms of his iconic recognisability), seems to be slowly sharing his fate: an interpretative stalemate that results from the need for the writer to be made intellectually accessible to a wide group of readers and from the effects of a media career (becoming a celebrity). Schulz has already become a kind of cultural brand, a recognizable literary-artistic image that can also be quite simply milked for cash. And in that sense, one doesn’t know whether to feel joy or sorrow at the fact that 2012 was not declared the Year of Schulz by the Polish Sejm, since it could have meant the writer would meet the pop culture fate of Chopin, who was kitschified in 2010 (Chopin caps, lollipops, gloves, stuffed animals, jewellery, alcohol, chocolates, smart phone apps, hip-hop concerts, restaurant menus and so on and so forth).

A special issue of the magazine *Radar* has reported on Schulz’s growing popularity worldwide, with Jerzy Jarzębski summing up the concept of Schulzomania and other writers presenting creative and critical work inspired by the Drohobych master and his work (among others, J. Andrukhovych, J. Prochaśko, M. Sieniewicz). This publication has the added virtue of being trilingual (it is issued in Polish, German, and Ukrainian) and available via the internet.5

A major event for Schulz devotees in recent years, providing what should be required reading for them, is the creation of a specialized magazine that revolves entirely

around Schulz, called *Schulz/Forum*, published in Gdańsk at the initiative of Stanisław Rosiek. And though the founders of the magazine plan for it to come out as a quarterly, at the moment it is published annually (the first issue came out in 2012, the second a year later). Its volumes, painstakingly and attractively put together, gather together the work of outstanding Schulz specialists as well as younger scholars and valuable archival items, while at the same time registering the afterlife of Schulz – artistic flights of fancy, echoes of his work and documentation of the continually expanding borders of Schulz’s popularity. Schulz is the only twentieth century Polish author who has been honoured with a monographic magazine, and furthermore at such a high level of quality – may the project long continue.

Of spectral books (thus in the spirit of Schulz, to recall his mythical *Messiah [Mesjasz]*): we have still to wait for Agata Tuszyńska’s long-anticipated book about Józefina Szelińska, Schulz’s beloved, concealed by biographers for years under the initial “J”⁶ (though the book may have come out by the time you read this). A collection of letters from Szelińska to Jerzy Ficowski served as the inspiration for this biographical narrative, though Tuszyńska hopes to be able to uncover at least part of her subject’s many years of correspondence with Schulz – perhaps this is what has kept her from rushing forward to publish her book? Or perhaps Tuszyńska is simply still searching for Schulz’s *Mesjasz*?

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⁶ Some passages were published in the first issue of Schulz/Forum.
As always, though they may be less convincing than individual monographs, conference volumes are precious publications – particularly this year, since 2012 produced relatively scant material. The main event of the Bruno Schulz Festival in Wrocław in autumn was the scholarly meeting, which produced the book now (a year later) published, entitled *Bruno od Księgi Blasku. Studia i eseje o twórczości Brunona Schulza*\(^7\) (Bruno from the Book of Radiance. Studies and Essays on the Works of Bruno Schulz). The papers collected in this book present a wide spectrum of interpretations and perspectives in Schulz studies, with big names appearing, naturally, next to voices from the younger generation of scholars, much to be valued. What I would like to accentuate foremost in the context of further studies is the formula in the title – the “Book of Radiance” alludes to a book by Władysław Panas, a monograph released in 1997, which devised a whole new interpretative current for approaching Schulz’s work\(^8\) (unfortunately the collection lacks an introduction, wherein this choice of title could have been elaborated on). Panas identified the Book of Radiance from Schulz’s story “Wiosna” (Spring) with the mystical, kabbalistic Zohar, and drew an entire interpretation of Schulz’s oeuvre from the kabbala of Isaac Luria, a 16th century Jewish mystic.

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\(^7\) P. Próchniak (ed.), *Bruno od Księgi Blasku. Studia i eseje o twórczości Brunona Schulza*, Kraków 2013.

Schulz Tangled Up in the Kabbala

Toward the end of 2012, a book by Michał Paweł Markowski came out with the title *Powszechna rozwiązanie. Schulz, egzystencja, literatura* (Universal Dissolution: Schulz, Existence, Literature), an attempt at a philosophical reading of Schulz; though generally the level and scope of activity in Schulz studies in that year was not impressive (perhaps also due to delays in publishing some works) this work stands out as the most important publication in Schulzology released then. In it, Markowski develops his thesis that Schulz’s work is dominated by irony and parody, put forward a few years earlier *Polska literatura nowoczesna. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy* (Polish Modern Literature. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy). In his new book, Markowski intends to show an existential Schulz, read philosophically, and largely succeeds in doing so. This represents the first extensive effort to refute Władysław Panas’s thesis, highly influential in Schulz studies, that postulates Schulz’s mysticism inspired by Luria’s kabbalism. Schulz read as an ironist and parodist of Jewish tradition is not reconciliable with the image of a solemn mystic, attempting through his prose to restore a lost divine order. And that is probably the greatest asset of Markowski’s book, whose other theses are disputable and in need of wide-ranging rebuttal, such as the author’s underestimation of Schulz’s ambivalence. I must also confess that though some fifteen years have passed since the

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10 This line is also developed in Panas’s subsequent books; to see how the interpretation has become practically an obligatory part of explicating Schulz, see *Słownik schulowski*, edited by W. Bolecki, J. Jarzębski and S. Rośek, where it is treated as obviously correct (first edition, 2003.)
publication of Panas’s interpretatively seductive book and a number of works have continued that interpretation, I still do not know what might connect Isaac Luria with Schulz. I don’t understand why a sixteenth century sectarian from Palestine would serve as the chief inspiration for a Polonized, secular Jew living in Drohobych, an avid reader of the Polish Romantics, familiar with Goethe and Hoffmann in the original, a Modernist who met Thomas Mann and studied for several years in Vienna (at that time one of the cultural capitals of Europe) and who, as is often forgotten, knew neither Hebrew nor Yiddish! Markowski’s book offers a chance to extract Schulz from this heavily reductive interpretative drawer in which the Drohobych master has been pigeonholed thanks largely to Panas’s flair for writing (his texts are beautifully written), rather than his less impressive critical argumentation.

**Birds of a Feather [/ A Friend of Ours]**

But there have been many attempts to decipher Schulz apart from Panas’s vision – as I mentioned earlier, Schulz studies have particularly thrived in the last fifteen or so years, presenting various perspectives for interpreting both individual works and the entire oeuvre of the author of *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. And now, what lemons they are! Because, in Markowski’s view, writing about Schulz has led to his being entombed in “academic writing” for years. Markowski in his philosophical monograph on Schulz grumbles about the proliferation of marginalia and fragments in the work being done on the writer’s life and output. As I mentioned, Markows-
ki’s latest book also further develops passages that dealt with Schulz in the scholar’s previous work. At the same time, however, Markowski repeats the critical gesture of his 2004 book on Gombrowicz, *Czarny nurt. Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* (Black Stream. Gombrowicz, World, Literature). There, he likewise negated all previous work in the field of Gombrowicz studies, finding it to be obsolete, irrelevant, fragmentary, and off the mark in its interpretations, and predicting that the only correct interpretation would take the form of an existential-psychoanalytical approach. Naturally any obligation to deal with earlier works is thus removed – when one is not standing on the “shoulders of giants,” one feels oneself to be a giant. This narcissistic critical stance is very much on display in his book on Schulz, because the first part (of four) consists of self-promotion against the background of the Drohobych master. I will merely add that on the publisher’s website, this book was modestly advertised as “the most original book on Schulz that has yet been written.”11 Let us not be deceived by such slogans, though portions of the book are of course highly interesting.

**Philosophical Schulz**

It is true that before Markowski’s book, few endeavoured to interpret Schulz in a philosophical vein— but there were attempts, though sometimes overly reductive ones,

such as for example Włodzimierz Bolecki’s reading, which designated Nietzscheanism as the sole inspiration for Schulz’s work. Markowski speaks of Schulz the existentialist and shows not so much influences as new philosophical contexts for interpreting the Drohobych master (in many places, we must admit, controversial and overburdened by the weight of his criticism), an interpretative effort that emerges as undeniably intriguing.

By way of complementary reading, let us here announce the forthcoming publication of *Schulz. Między mitem i filozofią* (Schulz. Between Myth and Philosophy, ed. J. Michalik, P. Bursztyka), the product of a conference organized by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw in collaboration with the Austrian Cultural Forum in June 2012. The discussion had the purpose of revealing the author of *The Cinnamon Shops* through philosophical interpretations – and what is more, formed one of a small number of scholarly celebrations of the Year of Schulz in Poland (besides the autumn conference in Wrocław), moreover organized by philosophers (and philosophy specialists) rather than – as was hitherto the case – by literary scholars. We should expect the publication to offer a number of new and intriguing readings of Schulz, particularly from the perspective of the hermeneutics of ideas.

**Political Schulz**

In his book, Markowski observes – in keeping with a widely held notion in Schulz studies – that utilitari-
an interpretations of Schulz’s works are unthinkable, in particular political interpretations (though we do find political undertones in Schulz – in the story “Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass” there is the motif of an enemy army and assassins on the city streets, and “Spring” (Wiosna) is a completely blatant anarchistic-revolutionary rebellion against the dictatorial rule of Franz Joseph I):

What is worse, Schulz cannot be used for any cause, he cannot be made a patron saint of the left or the right; neither Sierakowski, nor Michnik, nor least of all Wildstein will write an essay worth reading about him or his texts. Schulz is distinctly useless: he serves no cause, he does not fortify or rouse, and even his essays on Piłsudski are disappointing to old veterans of the Polish Legions.  

Nonetheless, in autumn of last year an intriguingly different addition to the existing corpus of work on Schulz arrived, with the release of Schulz, a new volume in the series of “guides” published by Krytyka Polityczna, the magazine and political organization. Each of these guides, several dozen of which have come out, focuses on a particular question, issue or figure relevant to contemporary culture, presenting new interpretations of them from a fixed, consistent political standpoint. Among

12 M.P. Markowski, Powszechna rozwiązanie, p. 28.
13 The political engagement of the magazine takes a form characteristic of the New Left, perceiving politics in a Foucaultian way as hidden discourses of power that reveal themselves in all areas of the life of society—this subject has enjoyed great popularity in recent times, with a “political turn” even being proclaimed in the contemporary humanities.
these guides we find such varied problems and issues as drug policy, the economic crisis, the Polish Brethren, TV serials, the work of Wajda or Miłosz – often presented in an innovative and inspiring way. How did the one devoted to the Drohobych master turn out? Well, surprisingly apolitical, as the editor and author of the introduction, Jakub Majmurek, even admits. Neither do the other texts included in the guide live up to the promise of the series’ name.\textsuperscript{14} Let us nonetheless take a closer look at this publication, since of the most recent works in Schulz studies, this one has the best chance of reaching a wide public; as the idea of the “guide” suggests, it may be many readers’ first encounter with a kind of pop-cultural reinterpretation of Schulz. The book contains four sections: the first consists of essayistic texts that interpret Schulz’s writing, the second and most interesting, in addition to an essay by Majmurek discussing the filmic structure of Schulz’s prose and the consequences this carries for film adaptations of his work, also includes an interview with the Quay Brothers, who have contributed significantly to spreading Schulz’s renown around the world through their film \textit{Street of Crocodiles}, which is discussed in an article by Peter Greenaway. The segment on film is completed by a plan for a feature film inspired by the last months of Schulz’s life, written by Maciej Pisuk, screenwriter of the popular film \textit{You Are God} (Jesteś Bogiem), about the cult hip-hop group Paktofonika. The third portion of the magazine is made up

\textsuperscript{14} M. Urbanowski’s article “Schulz i polityka” is an interesting attempt to reveal the political potential of Schulz’s texts; see \textit{Wielogłos} 2(16)/2013 (that issue of the magazine is to a large extent devoted to Schulz – it contains texts on the topos of the sanatorium, references to Kleist and to the problem of simulacra).
of creative literary works inspired by Schulz. These tributes were written by “Schulzoid” writers Andrzej Szpindler and Jacek Dobrowolski. Szpindler belongs to the cohort of post-avantgarde writers associated with Ha!art; his prose experiments with poetic associations and the destruction of semantic linkages in narration. The essence of such texts cannot be conveyed by a paraphrase, so here is a selected small glimpse of “Różowy Murzyn” (The Pink Moor):

Lord, fallen, the number of gods,” I say, “that’s what I’m saying, the number of gods, you hear me, you listen better when you say what you’re talking about. The number of gods is what you say. Because, who imagines space as a body? The external as an element, a total mug-out. Telesnout, kill the creations! No businessman like a telesthenic picnic. No. The centrally external = element. Everything checkered, skipping the centre, has got to land one. A little hodgepodge of e-motion. Mana Mane Tekel Fares. Boom-boom face shekel half-face / two halves of a face. Talent is 60 min. Dudeface. ‘Cause who imagines an intergalactic threatening text message as levelled-out fame, a pink little protracted body, supersmart because it’s in a visually mental crew?\footnote{A. Szpindler, \textit{Różowy Murzyn}, [in:] J. Majmurek, ed., Schulz. Przewodnik “Krytyki Politycznej” (Schulz. Krytyka Polityczna Guide), Warszawa 2012, p. 153.}

It goes on thus for several dozen pages (I haven’t seen anything like it in Polish literature since Krzysztof Niewrzędy’s \textit{Second life}). And though one critic found Szpindler’s rhythmic prose to be “an expression of aporetic semantics,” I feel more inclined to diagnose it as something on the
borderline between graphomania and insanity, possibly involving mistaking psychedelic drugs for talent. Anyone who can tell me what this has to do with Schulz must be a genius... Fortunately, the second story in the book, “The Magical Journey” (Podróż magiczna) by Jacek Dobrowolski – is an unequivocally more communicative work, a kind of pastiche of the poetics of Schulz and Kafka that draws from *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. The final segment of the book consists of free retellings of texts and motifs from Schulz in the form of comics.

To sum up, then, there is precisely zero political engagement of the *Krytyka Polityczna* type in this book – instead, the author proposes we read Schulz through the categories of periphery, or rather, the dialectic between centre and periphery (choosing *The Street of Crocodiles* as a starting point). It is hard to see any kind of revelatory interpretation of that problem in this procedure – it is rather an interpretative dead end, except for the interesting work done in recent years along those lines by Jerzy Jarzębski.¹⁶ Let us therefore concentrate on the critical readings we find in the first portion of the guide, where we may discover something more substantial from an approach of sustained hermeneutic analysis. Here, however, there is likewise a lack of any particularly innovative insight into Schulz’s work, perhaps confirming Markowski’s thesis that Schulzology is the art of footnotes and marginalia. In fact, the essay by Agata Bielik-Robson, continuing Panas’s kabbalistic line of interpretation, even admits as much in its title: “Life in the

Margins. A Small Appendix to the Topic of ‘Bruno Schulz and Hasidic Kabbala.’”\(^17\) Next, Adam Lipszyc (“Schulz na szaro, Schulz przed prawem” [Schulz in Gray, Schulz Before the Law]), interpreting the stories (rarely discussed until recently, but now increasingly a focus of attention) “Dodo,” “Edzio,” “The Pensioner” (Emeryt) and “Solitude” (Samotność), takes on the truly well-travelled theme of the relationship between “poetry” and “prose” in Schulz.\(^18\) In this essay, the author advocates his idea of a naïve reading, purged of the interpretative surplus that he finds in previous analyses – the idea of “reading from zero” was Lipszyc’s guiding light in his book of essays *Rewizja procesu Józefiny K. i inne lektury od zera* (A Reassessment of the Trial of Josephine K. and Other Readings From Zero) and of course in this vision of poetics it is not an interpretative excess, but as a general interpretative method for critical reading it can unfortunately mask ignorance and cognitive laziness (which does not diminish its nimble wit!). Similarly, Aldona Kopkiewicz in her essay on Schulz’s sensualist poetic language and Marta Konarzewska in an absorbing text about his sadomasochism continue a well-represented interpretative tradition in Schulz studies, though an uninitiated reader would have a hard time figuring out to what extent these texts present original analyses, since the authors could not be bothered to examine previous interpretations.

\(^{17}\) This essay was also published in the anthology *Bruno od Księgi Blasku*, cited above (footnote 7).

\(^{18}\) In another text concerning Schulz, in which he makes a tentative comparison between Schulz’s messianism and Jakub Frank’s sect, Lipszyc appears to forget that the similarities between the two were noted long ago by Władysław Panas in his books on Schulz – see A. Lipszyc, *Czerwona Księga Słów Pańskich, czyli Schulza Frankiem, a Franka Schulzem, ale z odrobiną Benjamina, albo druga wiosna i Entsetzen des Entsetzens, albo o czytaniu dosłownym*, [in:] Bruno od Księgi Blasku.
Likewise Julia Fiedorczuk, in what appears to be an innovative reading of Schulz’s prose in terms of “thing studies,” fitting into the recently increasingly popular post-humanist interpretative perspective, is in fact simply re-writing in the new humanities idiom what are hackneyed ideas, since Schulz is after all one of the most frequently cited examples of poetic reification in Polish literature, and the problematic ontological status of his mannequins, undermining anthropocentrism and subjectivity, has already acquired an extensive bibliography. What is at issue is not merely a lack of scholarly rigor or failure to observe common critical standards, but the lack of awareness of the interpretation’s banal and derivative character that these authors display, and that can turn into sloppiness or critical carelessness. When Jakub Majmurek writes emphatically in his essay on Schulz and film that “the cinema does not figure in Schulz’s prose at all, and it appears that the film form never made it to his native Drohobych”\textsuperscript{19} and draws certain interpretative conclusions from that statement, it is simply misleading, since (to name one example) the extended beginning of “July Night” (Noc lipcowa) – important to any interpretation of Schulz – consists of a description of a cinema and impressions of film screenings... Interpreters of Schulz often repeat themselves and produce paraphrases of each other, and the sphere of language in their discourse is dominated by unconscious allusions to theory, repetitions and uninspired reiteration of the same quotations, without any sense of the theoretical tradition. This peculiarly limited selective use of Schulz references, sometimes rather

\textsuperscript{19} J. Majmurek, \textit{Filmowe echa w Schulzu}, [in:] Schulz, p. 113.
bizarre, occurs in Bielik-Robson’s article as well; the critic polemicizes with Markowski’s book – which she admits not having read (!) – in the context of its alleged Lacanian reading of Schulz (when in fact there is no such interpretation therein).  

In another passage, Bielik-Robson – using the work of American scholar Karen Underhill – discovers that the famous quotation referring to the concept of “panmasquerade” invoked by Schulz in a letter to Witkacy relates to his own works as well as those of his correspondent; but the fact that it relates only to his own, and not to Witkacy’s writings, should be obvious from reading the letter itself.

Schulz – The Jewish Writer

Bielik-Robson’s article belongs, of course, to one of the dominant currents of interpretation, criticized in Markowski’s book – reading Schulz in the context of Jewish mysticism (the Lurian kabbala), enhanced here (and often in Schulz studies) by associations with Kafka and Bielik-Robson’s usual Freudian contexts. One of many works that continue Panas’s findings, her article demonstrates another general trend among interpretations of Schulz’s works and biography in critical texts of recent years. Such analyses increasingly express the belief – particularly prevalent among non-Polish scholars – that Schulz is chiefly, indeed exclusively, a Jewish writer. Here, I am not looking to rehash the dispute over what national literature

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20 A. Bielik-Robson, Życie na marginesach. Drobny aneks do kwestii «Bruno Schulz a kabala chasydzka», [in:] Schulz, p. 16 [also in Bruno od Księgi Blasku, p. 248].
21 Bielik-Robson, Życie na marginesach, p. 31 [260] – in fact the entire letter is Schulz’s interpretation of The Cinnamon Shops, and relates in no way to the works of Witkacy. For the sake of precision I will add that no such assertion is made in Underhill’s doctoral thesis, Schulz and Jewish Modernity (available in internet repositories) either.
Schulz’s oeuvre belongs to, but simply addressing the question of locating his writings in their proper cultural context. I have no intention of taking away from Schulz his Jewish roots and Judaic cultural traditions, but seek to turn our attention to the monopolization of critical discourse by the dangerously nationalistic, that is, ethnocentric drive to attribute Schulz’s work entirely to Jewish culture. To see Schulz as above all a Jewish writer (kabbalist, Frankian messianic, post-Hasid, successor to Kafka, writer of the Shoah, kindred spirit to Benjamin, anticipator of Piotr Paziński’s prose, and so on) – these are simply ex post facto perspectives: using today’s understanding and method of defining Jewishness and what it means to belong to Jewish culture, concepts largely created in postwar America in reaction to the experience of the Holocaust. To justify such a position more broadly, I will refer to a competent authority in this matter and quote a long passage from some reflections on the subject by a well-known American writer of Jewish extraction (who was saved from the Holocaust by going to France) – Raymond Federman, who reconstructs the historical status of the concept of the “Jewish writer” as follows:

For it is a fact that the label of ‘Jewish writer’ was invented after World War Two, out of necessity, I suppose, after the Holocaust became known as a truth instead of a falsity or a lie.

22 This dispute probably took its most heated form in the quarrel over the export of Schulz’s paintings discovered in the Landau villa from Yad Vashem by envoys of Yad Vashem, and later in the dispute surrounding the trilingual inscription (in Ukrainian, Polish, and Hebrew) on the memorial plaque placed on Schulz’s house in Drohobych, describing him as an “outstanding Jewish painter and writer, a master of the Polish word.”
There were Jewish writers, of course, especially novelists, before the Second World War, in many parts of the world as well as in America, or rather there were many writers who happened to be Jewish before the war, but they were writers first, and only incidentally, occasionally considered ‘Jewish writers’ (except for those who wrote in Yiddish, or that small group of American Jewish writers during the first half of the century – the Tenement Writers – who depicted Jewish life in America).

Most of the pre-war Jewish writers did not have much to do, much to say about Jewish life, Jewish history, Jewish tradition, Jewish religion, or Jewish suffering, and no one expected them to deal with these questions. A case in point, Kafka who was labelled a Jewish writer only after World War Two. Before that, he was simply a great writer, an experimental writer. Perhaps the same could be said of Marcel Proust, even though only half-Jewish. Most of the pre-war Jewish writers were more concerned with social and political issues related to the human condition in general, or to the society in which they lived, rather than with specific Jewish problems. Some in fact, were more concerned with aesthetic problems rather than social, political or religious questions. I mean, of course, the fiction writers, not the theologians or historians of Judaism. It is true that the Jewish background of some of these story-tellers became part of the texture of their writing, but it was not the essential part.23

23 R. Federman, “The Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jewish Writer.”
This modality of post-Holocaust cultural colonization of authors who have equally strong roots in Central European culture has begun to be uncritically applied by many Schulz interpreters, particularly—as I noted earlier—Western (and especially American) scholars, and this is also happening in the field of Schulz studies, as exemplified in Bielik-Robson’s article, among others. Schulz, like Kafka, provides one example of the object of this kind of reading—which has nothing intrinsically wrong with it or misguided, so long as the author does not become only a Jewish writer, and the peculiar context that includes Polish culture and literature, in its borderland, Galician, Ukrainian version within which Schulz lived and functioned, but also the culture of German modernism, in which he was immersed culturally (and more broadly, the multicultural Hapsburg empire), becomes merely an incidental accretion, rather than a substantial aspect of Schulz’s life and work. Of course, the biographical legend of the artist as Jewish victim of the Holocaust often determines our reception of Schulz’s prose, but one should be conscious of the mythologizing potential of that image. And that is probably the only message of Schulz’s politics that can be extracted from the Krytyka Polityczna guide.

The Celebrification of Criticism
While the practice of “transcribing” Schulz into new languages of the humanities can be an interesting enterprise that opens new spaces of interpretation, there

24 J. Jarzębski also discusses interpretative reconstructions of Schulz’s work that take into account the problem of the Shoah in his article “Schulzomania?” in Radar 6/2012, pp. 4–6.
is also some risk that in the process the interpretative postulates of the new humanities will impose themselves on the text. Those criteria have been given their fullest treatment in Markowski’s book – they are taken straight from the theses of postmodernism (as well as post-Structuralism and deconstructionism). The author of *Universal Dissolution* declares not only a new way of reading, disconnected from the rich heritage of Schulz studies (rejected on the basis of its undue fealty to causality and focus on the exploration of marginalia), but also a new ideal of the rhetorical and persuasive dimension of interpretation. What is crucial is the suggestive nature of the text, the interpreter’s ability to convince the reader and win him over to his side – the “struggle for recognition.” To write about literature is to impose one’s own point of view, in competition with previous interpretations, which in the process are in some way rendered invalid (Markowski’s chief competitor is Panas, though he forgets, in the course of refuting Schulz’s Jewish messianism, that he seeks to demonstrate that Panas’s thesis is objectively erroneous and that his own interpretation is the obligatory, correct one). Furthermore, such an interpretation has the power to change the nature of the object under examination, which, deprived of its specific features and contexts, exists in a state of total dependence on its interpretation. Markowski here cites, among other examples, Derrida’s readings of Celan or Joyce; these artists, from all accounts, can no longer be perceived outside of that interpretative context.
The criteria set out by Markowski also fit the texts I have referred to from the *Krytyka Polityczna Guide to Schulz* – well-written, rhetorically seductive and perhaps convincing, “suitable” for a reader who treats the idea of an intellectual guidebook seriously (because this will be his first encounter, or one of his first, with Schulz’s work, engaging with it at an intellectual level), debatable only for a specialist grounded in the subject. Both books can serve as examples of a process of celebrification affecting the sphere of things loosely Schulz-related – to be precise, the creation of a pop-cultural “Schulz” brand, or the emergence of a situation in which the author of The Cinnamon Shops retreats into the background, and what matters most is the disposer of the brand, i.e., the narrator of a gripping story about his own private Schulz, creating a new myth, rather carelessly perhaps, but above all, recognizable and popular, and its name shall be: Panas, Markowski, Bielik-Robson, Lipszyc… In the end, this process nevertheless has positive results as well – Schulzomania may contribute to the banalization and oversimplification of how we see the Drohobych master’s work, but it will finally lead to its further promulgation. Schulz was himself not afraid of what’s trashy, after all, nor oblivious to the ambivalent charm of mass culture. One might say that the author of *The Book* even foresaw this situation – if we treat his oeuvre as the equivalent of his mythic Original, subject of many books of criticism:
Arkadiusz Kalin, The Afterlife of Schulz...

Because usually books are like meteors. Each one has one instant, the moment when it takes flight like a phoenix, all of its pages on fire. [...] The exegetes of the Book aver that all books seek to be the Original. They only live by the borrowed life that in the moment of flight returns to its old source. So the number of books diminishes, and the Original grows.\textsuperscript{25}

translated by Timothy Williams