To conclude, I wish to cite another remark of Stala’s, while keeping in mind the story of the snake whose mutilated body internalizes the knife’s blade:

Creation understood as a supplement to the great book of the world, a seemingly insignificant and in-formal extension, but which grows into it over time, changing our view of the world in an imperceptible way, indiscernibly but consistently revolutionizing tradition, seen as an inseparable part of existence.

The paradoxical and authoritative nature of the official logic of mimesis (model – copy, nature – creation, inside/idea – outside/appearances) is here creatively undermined by the logic of non-exclusivity, shared presence, growth and implantation; the logic of the supplement that relieves contradictions.

Translated by Timothy Williams

Stala, Na marginesach rzeczywistości, p. 50.
The Cinnamon Shops and Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass are inhabited by many crippled characters, disabled both mentally and physically. The title characters of the stories “Dodo” and “Edzio” undoubtedly fit into this category, as well as Uncle Hieronimus and the beggar Tłuja, but we should also consider how ageing is a form of infirmity in Bruno Schulz’s work– as we see in the experiences of old Jacob, but also the older people in the stories “Solitude” (Samotność) and “A Pensioner” (Emeryt), as well as the cyborgization of which Uncle Edward, turned into an electric bell, becomes an inadvertent victim.¹ We may also discuss mannequins or dummies in terms of disability, but, as Jerzy Jarzębski notes, “the point here is not being an invalid so much as the lack intrinsic to the ut-

¹ Uncle Edward’s metamorphosis reminds one of fantasies of prosthetic bodies containing foreign elements, often mechanically operating. See A. Rosochacka, “Potworne ciała protetycznego. Obcość uwewnętrznionia”, Świat i Słowo 1/2012, pp. 125–135.
most being of these creatures, their unfulfilled existence, relating to their simulated life.”² It is easy to notice that in stories by the author of “Spring” (Wiosna) being crippled is a manifestation of the motif, typical in these works, of the male characters’ failure.³ The problem of infirmity constitutes an important avenue for interpreting Schulz’s short stories, one hitherto neglected by scholars.

There are at least two reasons why the author of “Spring” was so eager to introduce characters with disabilities into his short stories. In the first place, infirmity afflicted his two cousins, who are artistically transformed in the stories “Dodo” and “Edzio.”⁴ Schulz had grown accustomed to the presence of disabled people in his immediate environment and made them characters in his “personal mythology.” In the second place, human imperfection interests the author of the “Treatise on Mannequins” as an atypical concentration of matter. The experience of old age was also close to Schulz, since he had taken care of his sick father and other unwell members of his family.

The Drohobych artist, by placing handicapped and elderly people in his gallery of characters, turns readers’ attention to many serious problems, vital in his time and ours. This article, due to limited space, will concentrate on the image of disability in the short stories “Dodo” and “Edzio.” Before describing Schulz’s visions of infirmity,

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3 Jarzębski, Schulz, p. 181.
4 J. Ficowski, Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice. Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia, Sejny 2002, pp. 70–71, 461. Schulz often drew his cousin, Dawid Heimberg, looking with fascination at his unnaturally large head. That relative was the original model for the character of Dodo.
however, a short overview of how people with disabilities lived in the writer’s era may help.

The interwar period saw the establishment of the first schools for people with disabilities in Poland. In 1921, at the initiative of Maria Grzegorzewska, the Academy of Special Education (now the Maria Grzegorzewska University) was created for the purpose of preparing teachers to work with handicapped students. Since then, new institutions for the education of people with disabilities have gradually multiplied. Unfortunately, such undertakings were slow to develop. For example, in 1921 there existed no more than eight special schools, and seven years later—only 29. Furthermore, they were unevenly distributed geographically. The greatest number were found in the western and central voivodeships, with a great deal fewer located in the southern and eastern ones. The requirement of schooling encompassed children with disabilities only in cases where there was an appropriate establishment in the vicinity of their homes. The institutions that were established thus helped few of them, with repercussions for the tens of thousands of people with disabilities in Poland—most were condemned to social exclusion from early childhood, due to their lack of access to education. In the best of cases, this majority were taken care of by their family and relatives, who were usually ill-prepared for such a task.

7 Sękowska, Pedagogika..., op. cit., p. 173.
According to a certain stereotype, interpretative contexts that relate to the social setting of the interwar period are of little use in reading Schulz’s work, except perhaps the depiction of changes occurring in Drohobych as a result of capitalist expansion. There are, however, other angles that equally justify invoking those contexts. Read through the social prism, the stories “Dodo” and “Edzio” become sad documents of the interwar reality. Schulz devotes these stories entirely to the eponymous disabled characters, thereby in some sense ennobling them.

Dodo is a mentally underdeveloped man, the cousin of the story’s narrator, whose name is Józef. Dodo’s infirmity is immediately apparent – his unnaturally large head signals his affliction. The narrator makes an ironical remark, noting that Dodo’s hat “had been specially made to fit the dimensions of his skull.”

He further explains:

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\text{Once, long ago, when still a child, Dodo had been stricken by a serious brain sickness, during which he had lain unconscious for many months, closer to death than life. And when finally he did recover, after all, it transpired that he had been withdrawn from circulation; that he no longer belonged to the community of rational people.}\]

We see that the character was stricken with his handicap in childhood, as the result of a serious illness. This

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9 Schulz, "Dodo," trans. Davis.
misfortune deprived him of the possibility of functioning normally in society. Despite his infirmity, Dodo has an interesting face, which makes an impression on Józef: “... his features assumed the shape of those experiences that had passed him by. They imputed some biography that had never happened, but which—inscribed nowhere save in the sphere of the possible—modelled and carved his countenance into the illusory mask of a great tragedian, filled with the sadness and knowledge of all things.”

The quoted passage shows a certain sarcasm on the part of the narrator, who looks on helplessly at Dodo, aware of his unrealized potential. The depth of the character’s disability is forcibly confirmed by his communicative skills or lack thereof. The man is able to speak, but does so with enormous effort, using monosyllables and failing to make eye contact with his interlocutor. The sense of his utterances is limited to elementary meanings which, moreover, relate exclusively to the present moment. The deficiencies of Dodo’s verbal expression are compensated for by his gift for mimicry and gesticulation: “He was sometimes able to sustain the conversation for a few minutes more, beyond that scope, but only due to a stock of seemingly meaningful expressions and gestures to which he was disposed, whose ambiguity served him well enough in all situations, compensating for what he lacked in articulate speech, sustaining by their lively mimicry a suggestion of perciplent empathy.”

10 Schulz, “Dodo.”
11 Schulz, “Dodo.”
Such behavior testifies to the fact that the person with a disability wants to make contact with his environment, but does not know how to do so—perhaps because no one has taught him how. In this situation, he attempts to retain the attention of his conversation partners using nonverbal communication. The narrator states that in his interactions with other people, the invalid Dodo usually plays the role of “an extra, a passive observer.”\textsuperscript{12} All of that proves that Dodo is curious about the world, but in his discoveries encounters a barrier difficult to surmount, since he is unable to communicate with people—and it is extremely probable that his existence would look completely different if someone had helped him shape that ability in the years of his schooling.

As it is, the character lives in a quotidian monotony, remaining an utterly inactive person. Fortunately, he does not suffer, since he is unaware of his handicap:

\emph{Should anyone imagine that Dodo protested inwardly against this state of affairs, they were [would be] mistaken. Ingenuous and unsurprised, in sedate assent and with imperturbable optimism, he accepted it as his natural way of life. He set his affairs in order. He arranged his particulars within the confines of that uneventful monotony.}\textsuperscript{13}

Dodo goes out for a walk every morning and attracts attention in the form of malicious stares, mainly from

\textsuperscript{12} Schulz, “Dodo.”

\textsuperscript{13} Schulz, “Dodo.”
children. He experiences their vexation, and mistakenly interprets it as polite concern. This pathetic image presents another problem faced by the mentally handicapped: the need to have caregiving organized for them at all times of day.

The living conditions of people with disabilities as represented in Schulz’s story also leave much to be desired. Dodo lives in a small room together with his parents, Hieronimus and Retycja, and his cousin Karola. His father should also be regarded as infirm, though he was not always that way. Józef explains that “[t]hose who had known him in his younger days claimed that his irrepressible temperament had known neither restraint, consideration nor scruple. He would take great satisfaction in imparting to the terminally ill his insights into the death that awaited them. He seized upon visits of condolence in order to subject the life of the deceased to harsh criticism, to the dismay of the grieving family, leaving everyone in tears and inconsolable. To people who concealed some unpleasant and sensitive personal matter, he offered loud and sneering reproach. But one particular night, he returned home late from a business trip, utterly transformed, numb with fear, and tried to hide under the bed.”

Since then, the cruel Hieronimus had abandoned his dubious business interests and withdrawn from life. The events of one day had given him such a shock that he succumbed to mental illness and lost contact with his sur-

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14 Schulz, “Dodo.”
roundings, shutting himself inside the four walls of his apartment. The trauma he suffered had the additional effect of causing him to cease looking after his son:

Uncle Hieronimus and Dodo lived their lives in spite of each other, in two different dimensions that crossed but never quite danced a tango. If ever they met, then each would gaze far past the other, like two animals of different, distant species that do not quite notice each other.15

Faced with this turn of events, Aunt Retycja looks after the two mentally handicapped men. Bearing the burden alone, she finds herself in a very difficult situation. She cannot find peace even at night, because her son suffers from insomnia. Here is how Józef summarizes Dodo’s sad existence: “In that halfwit’s body, somebody without experiences was growing old. Somebody without a crumb of content in him was heading toward death.”16

Schulz’s next character with a disability is the eponymous hero of the story “Edzio,” a twentysomething with palsied [paralyzed?] legs. The narrator mordantly describes the process of deformation of the young man’s body; where he is able-bodied, even athletic, from the waist up, his legs are misshapen and completely inert: “Edzio has a tendency to corpulence; not the soft and spongy kind, but rather, the athletic and muscular variety. His shoulders are as

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15 Schulz, “Dodo.”
16 Schulz, “Dodo.”
Edzio stands half undressed in his room, exercising with his dumbbells. He needs a great deal of strength, twice as much strength in his shoulders, which take the place of his lifeless legs, and so he exercises ardently, in secret, all through the night.  

Moving by his own strength, every day Edzio gets himself to the nearby shop, on the ground floor of the tenement where he lives. He buys a newspaper there before going home and carefully reading every page. When he finishes reading he cuts out the parts that interest him and keeps the clippings

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in his scrapbook. Jarzębski notes how this activity of the disabled man joins diligent hard work with a impracticality. The scene under discussion thus exposes another social problem: the need to prepare people with disabilities who are capable of working for some kind of career. Edzio in fact could work, if he had certain conditions assured him and were able to carry out his tasks in a sitting position.

The narrator, again employing sarcasm, makes an effort to convince the reader that this character derives satisfaction from the life he leads: “in the shadow of his affliction, Edzio takes full advantage of his exceptional privilege of idleness; in his heart of hearts, he is content with his private and, as it were, individually drawn up transaction with fate.”

Another form of entertainment enjoyed by Edzio is viewing Adela, the young and attractive servant in Józef’s home, by night. This demands a heroic effort from him, since his housemates, aiming to prevent such escapades, hide his crutches from him in the evening. Edzio therefore goes out from home, crawling on the ground, and by this means arrives at the window of the woman’s room, located on the ground floor. He looks at her through the window pane: “He approaches like a great, white dog, with the knee-bends of a quadruped, in great, shuffling bounds along the clattering boards of the porch. He has reached Adela’s window now, and with a pained grimace—just as he does every night—he presses his pale, chubby face, gleaming in the moonlight, to the window pane. He

20 J. Jarzębski, Schulz, p. 181.
speaks, tearfully and insistently. Weeping, he insists that they have locked his crutches away in a wardrobe, and so he must run at nights on all fours, like a dog."22

The fragment just cited demonstrates another serious problem potentially faced by many people with disabilities: the lack of opportunities to build interactions with people of the opposite sex, develop partnerships, and satisfy natural sexual needs. For that reason, frustrated Edzio seeks substitutional means for obtaining erotic satisfaction. The young man suffers all the more since he has no way of meeting any women.

Family relationships of people with disabilities can also leave much to be desired. Józef enigmatically declares that “some very serious dispute is taking place between Edzio and his parents, the background and particulars of which no one really knows.”23 As a result of this dispute, there are frequent quarrels. Perhaps the subject of the disagreement is Edzio’s sin of making nightly “trips” to Adela’s window.24 It culminates with Edzio experiencing physical violence at the hands of his nearest and dearest (particularly his father). Józef comments on the problem ironically, presenting the suffering of the disabled man as an interesting spectacle: “We listen, shaken and ashamed, although not without peculiar satisfaction deriving from the idea of wild and fantastic violence inflicted on the

22 Schulz, “Edzio.”
23 Schulz, “Edzio.”
person of an athletic young man, without heed to the paralysis of his legs.”

In presenting characters with disabilities in Schulz’s short stories, we should not forget Tłuja, the insane beggar who appears in “August” and reappears later in “The Comet.” Though she is not given as full a characterization as those of Dodo and Edzio, she is an unusually suggestive creation. The narrator presents her appearance as off-putting:

*Tłuja squats amid her yellow blankets and rags; her huge head bristles with a shock of black hair; her face is as contractile as the bellows of an accordion. Occasionally, a grimace of anguish folds that accordion into a thousand transverse pleats, but bewilderment soon stretches it back, smooths out the folds, and reveals the chinks of her tiny eyes and the moist gums and yellowed teeth behind her snout-like, fleshy lips. Hours pass, filled with heat and boredom, as Tłuja babbles in an undertone, dozes, grumbles quietly, and coughs. A dense swarm of flies covers the slumberer.*

The insane character, unconscious of her actions, becomes an actor in a one-act tragicomedy: “on some far removed square, Tлуja, the mad girl, driven to despair by the teasing of boys, began to dance her wild sarabande, kicking her skirts high, to the delight of the crowd.”

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25 Schulz, “Edzio.”
26 This character was based on an actual inhabitant of Drohobych. J. Ficowski, Regiony..., p. 70.
The narrator’s attitude toward Dodo, Edzio, and Tłuja, all inarguably unhappy people, is worth pondering. His approach gives the impression of a striking, even disturbing lack of concern. Józef appears not to manifest empathy or have consideration for the suffering of people with disabilities; instead, he focuses on a behavioristic description of them.29 This happens because in Schulz’s oeuvre, human imperfection becomes matter in a particular state of concentration, its degeneration caused by the unsubdued powers of nature. Jerzy Ficowski notes that “in this predilection for the elements of deformity in life, there dwells not only a horror of reality, but simultaneously a teratophilia reminiscent of Surrealism, a deep fascination with the existence of bizarre forms that undermine the stiff rules of reality.”30

Hence the author treats disability as a state in which the body takes on fascinating shapes. Teratophilia is a sexual attraction to physically deformed individuals. Something of that nature is definitely not what is going on here. Ficowski must have had in mind not teratophilia, but teratology— the science that studies developmental defects and abnormalities in people and animals.31 To sum up, we can generalize that the author of The Cinnamon Shops delights in creating characters with disabilities because they provide an impetus toward the invention of interesting descriptions.

schulzian.net/translation/comet.htm [accessed 19.08.2015].
29 Schulz’s characters appear markedly depreciated when juxtaposed with, for example, the characters in Bolesław Leśmian’s “Songs of the Limping,” people who are physically impaired, but nonetheless have dignity and embrace life’s challenges.
30 Ficowski, Regiony..., p. 71.
Furthermore, Jarzębski is worth quoting in his observation that “disability clearly intrigues Schulz, and awakens anxiety in him, because it is a grotesque diminution of the person, an unsettling of the individual’s physical proportions and an intervention in its internal composition.”

But does Schulz’s narrator really feel satisfaction when he speaks in a sarcastic tone about people with disabilities or looks at their deformed bodies? In fact his irony is imbued with bitterness, frequently a conspicuous signal of human helplessness in the face of insoluble problems. After all, Józef is a deeply sensitive young man and it would be hard to suspect him of ridiculing his neighbours’ or relatives’ pain. His descriptions of them bring to mind above all the many difficulties that face people with disabilities: lack of access to special schools, professional care and orthopedic equipment, the negative attitude from the local community, who do not accept difference, problems with the organization of one’s free time, poor living conditions, communication barriers, a failure to fully satisfy the need to feel safe, and finally, a lack of opportunities for developing meaningful relationships and building long-term partnerships. These problems are visibly present in the short stories “Dodo” and “Edzio.” The narrator, without naming them explicitly, instead shows them indirectly, with the help of visual descriptions not lacking in irony, powerfully communicating with the reader’s imagination and affect, thereby expressing his position concerning the tough situation in which people with disabilities find themselves.

32 Jarzębski, Schulz, p. 181.
Today one can say with certainty that although many institutions whose goal is to help people with disabilities have been established since the interwar period, the message of Schulz’s works has not lost any of its urgency, because the handicapped often deal with the same obstacles and adversities. What is more, reading *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* today, we find them attractive as works that acknowledge human imperfection, living as we do in an age where everyone is in mad pursuit of absolute and total flawlessness.

translated by Timothy Williams