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Introduction: Seven Decades of Schulzology

Dieter De Bruyn & Kris Van Heuckelom

When the Polish artist Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) eventually managed to publish his first collection of phantasmagoric stories in 1933, he could not have imagined that his modest literary output would ever lead to an accumulation of critical readings. Even more, when working in complete privacy on his drawings and graphic works in the 1920s, he would not even have believed that someone would ever be interested in writing an academic essay on this part of his creative activity. When looking back to the past seven decades of "Schulzology" (*schulzologia* in Polish), however, one can only find that the assemblage of critical and scholarly writings has been growing steadily, to such an extent even that the presentation of a comprehensive "state of the art" appears to be almost impossible. For those interested in an exhaustive overview of Schulzology, the only advice is to check the online shrine for the Polish artist at www.brunoschulz.org, where Branislava Stojanović has gathered virtually all available bibliographical references, together with many other valuable sources. In this introduction to yet another collection of Schulzological papers, then, we will limit ourselves to a more modest critical discussion of the key figures and important currents in Schulzology. At the same time, however, some remarks should be made on the issue of critical and scholarly overproduction.

Few people will object if we state that what we are living today is nothing less than some kind of "Schulzomania". Indeed, Schulz nowadays is an international literary star who is worshipped by readers and critics alike. Looking back on the history of Schulzology, however, we must admit that the reception of Schulz's creative output started in the 1930s with what could be called pure "Schulzophobia". As Włodzimierz Bolecki has already demonstrated in his major study on the "poetic prose model" ("poetycki model prozy"; 1996 [1982]) in the Polish interwar period, Schulz's stories, immediately after their publication in the 1930s, conflicted with the horizon of expectations of many Polish critics. In many cases, this conflict could be resolved by applying the rules for reading lyrical works: "One could appreciate the plastic or poetic values in it (the 'images' or the 'metaphors'), but there was clearly the lack of a 'theme', a 'leading idea', a 'problem', etc." ("[m]ożna było w niej oceniać walory plastyczne ('obrazy') lub poetyckie ('metafory'), ale oczywisty był brak 'tematu', 'idei przewodniej', 'problemu' etc."; 1996 [1982]: 305). As soon as critics tried to extract a consistent world view from Schulz's stories, however, the strictly axiological character of their approach was immediately exposed. As Bolecki has pertinently remarked, this attempt at reading Schulz's literary world according to existing moral standards led not only to accusations of "antihumanism and establishment of chaos" ("antyhumanizm i utwierdzanie chaosu"; Wyka and Napierski 2000 [1939]: 422) but also to the attribution of immoral elements in Schulz's prose to the author's conduct in real life. Whereas Kazimierz Wyka and Stefan Napierski are still rather polite in their notorious diatribe against Schulz's prose ('Dwugłos o Schulzu' or 'Dialogue on Schulz', 1939), the most severe personal attack against Schulz and such contemporaries as Witold Gombrowicz and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) was launched by the Marxist critic Ignacy Fik in his essay on what he terms a "literature of sick maniacs" ('Literatura choromaniaków', 1935). In order to have an impression of what Fik thought of Schulz and the like, we may have a look at the following fragment of his essay:

> Czy nie jest zastanawiające, że piszący [taką literaturę] autorzy są to ludzie, którzy w rozwoju zatrzymali się na fazie dojrzewania płciowego, że są to homoseksualiści, ekshibicjoniści i psychopaci, degeneraci, narkomani, ludzie chronicznie chorzy na żołądek, mieszkający na stałe w szpitalach, ludzie nie rozróżniający jawy od snu, hipochondrycy, neurastenicy, mizantropi? (1961 [1935]: 126)

> (Isn't it striking that the authors who write such literature are people whose development was arrested during the phase of sexual maturation, that they are homosexuals, exhibitionists and psychopaths, degenerates, narcomaniacs, people who chronically suffer from stomach trouble, who permanently live in hospitals, people who don't distinguish between sleeping and waking, hypochondriacs, neurasthenics, misanthropes?)

When reading such merciless tirades against Schulz and his creative activities, one may indeed have difficulties believing that a movement in the opposite way, toward Schulzomania, would ever take place.

It is commonly known that postwar critical interest in Schulz was temporarily halted in the difficult years before the Polish October. In his overview of the reception of Schulz's oeuvre between 1945 and 1976, Andrzej Sulikowski calls the period from 1945 until 1955 the "years of silence" ("lata milczenia"; 1978: 282). From 1956 onwards, Schulzology gradually started flourishing under the impulse of Artur Sandauer and Jerzy Ficowski. Whereas Ficowski has mainly been important for the collection and publication of all kinds of Schulziana and for the reconstruction of the biographical portrait of the writer (cf. his 1967 and 1986 monographs, published in one volume in 2002), Sandauer was the first to map out several routes for a more academic approach of Schulz's stories in his 1956 essay 'Rzeczywistość zdegradowana (Rzecz o Brunonie Schulzu)' ('The Degraded Reality (A Contribution on Bruno Schulz)'; 1964 [1956]). On the one hand, his analysis of Schulz's fiction against the background of twentieth-century socio-economic developments was continued by such critics as Czesław Samojlik (1965), Tomasz Burek (1966), and Wiesław Paweł Szymański (1970). On the other hand, his suggestion that Schulz should be studied in the framework of early twentieth-century experimental currents was further elaborated in discussions about the surrealistic (Dubowik 1971, Speina 1971, Jarzębski 1973) and expressionistic (Speina 1974, Wyskiel 1980) traits of his stories. In addition to this, the reading strategy of "applying the rules for reading lyrical works" was further developed in three subsequent articles by Krzysztof Miklaszewski (1966, 1971a, 1971b).

Academic criticism of Schulz's works received its next stimulus in 1974, when Wojciech Wyskiel organized the first conference devoted to the writer from Drohobycz. In the wake of this event, a structuralist turn took place in Schulzology, as exemplified in the writings of such influential scholars as Władysław Panas (1974a, 1974b, 1976), Krzysztof Kłosiński (1976), Wojciech Wyskiel (1977a, 1977b), Jerzy Jarzębski (1976, 1984), and Wojciech Karkowski (1976, 1980). Their valuable thoughts on Schulz's stories were seconded by a few of the first foreign Schulz scholars, such as Colleen Taylor Sen (1969, 1972) and Elisabeth Goślicki-Baur (1972).

Despite this structuralist turn, a closer look at the growing corpus of critical accounts toward the end of the 1970s reveals two major methodological trends that would continue to dominate Schulzology. First, many critics proposed a *mimetic* reading of Schulz's stories (focusing on the distorted literary reality they produce) instead of a *reflexive* one (focusing on the process underlying the production of this particular literary reality). In other words, the approach many of them took was *ontocentric* instead of *logocentric* (cf. Stala 1993 for this distinction). Second, critics tended to treat the many seemingly self-informing comments in Schulz's stories as authoritative clues that could be easily interpolated into their own particular interpretation of the text. As a result, such critics were caught in a kind of circular reasoning because discursive parts of the text were used in order to elucidate the same text.

In the early 1980s, this ontocentric and mimetic model of reading Schulz's stories was attacked by Włodzimierz Bolecki. In what is undoubtedly the most valuable and comprehensive study on the fiction of such interwar writers as Schulz, Witkacy, and Gombrowicz, he focuses on generations of readers' difficulties to construct a consistent story world out of these very alienating and unusually discursive narrative accounts. More specifically, Bolecki argues that the interwar authors under scrutiny have propagated a new "poetical prose model" ("poetycki model prozy") as an alternative to the prevailing "vehicular prose model" ("wehikularny model prozy"; 1996 [1982]: 14). Whereas in the latter case literary language is overshadowed by its referential function (as in Realism), in the former case it "draws attention to its autonomy" ("zwraca uwagę na swoją autonomię") and thus takes on a "reflexive character" ("character samozwrotny"; 12). With respect to Schulz's stories, Bolecki argues that his literary world is the result of linguistic rather than of mimetic processes: "The narrative utterance stops being a story about what once existed because it turns out to be itself an event in language" ("Wypowiedź narracyjna przestaje być opowiadaniem o tym, co niegdyś zaistniało, albowiem sama okazuje się zdarzeniem w języku"; 300).

Though Schulzology continued flourishing in the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Steinhoff 1984, Chwin 1985, Robertson 1990, 1991, Brown 1991), only few critics elaborated on the turn toward the logocentric reading that had been promoted by Bolecki. Characteristically, those critical accounts that addressed Schulz's reflexive treatment of the creative possibilities of language (Rachwał 1985, van der Meer 1990, Schönle 1991) all focused on the subcycle on tailors' dummies (*manekiny*) in *Sklepy cynamonowe* (*Cinnamon Shops*, 1934) and more specifically on the rich metaphorical power of such motives as the tailor's dummy and "trash" (*tandeta*).

In the wake of the 1992 jubilee year, the popularity of Bruno Schulz in literary and artistic criticism could not be stopped. What is typical of this new phase in Schulzology is the heterogeneity of critical approaches and research subjects – a situation which is, of course, completely in accordance with the typically postmodern plurality of philosophical, literary theoretical and culturological discourses that was gaining prominence in independent Poland (cf. Dąbrowski 2000 for a discussion of Schulz in this context). In an ever-increasing number of publications (e.g. in two influential conference volumes: Kitowska-Łysiak 1992 and Jarzębski 1994b), scholars began to devote attention to "new" topics such as the feminine element in Schulz, the local, Galician or Habsburg background of Schulz's works, his creative reworking of biblical, kabbalistic, and Jewish elements, and eventually to Schulz's visual output and its relation to his literary works.

The position of Schulz's artwork within Schulzology deserves a separate discussion. Although his pictorial works received critical attention in the 1920s and 1930s (Lauterbach 1929, Vogel 1930, Dresdner 1935, Witkiewicz 1935), they remained in the shadow of his literary works for many decades. The first steps toward rediscovering Schulz's visual output were taken in the 1960s, with an exhibition of Schulz drawings in the Adam Mickiewicz Literary Museum and the subsequent publication of thirty Schulz reproductions (Schulz 1967). Although these initiatives coincided with an increasing interest in Schulz's pictorial *oeuvre* (Witz 1967, Becker 1967) and were followed by some introductory articles in the foreign press (e.g. Kosko 1976), in-depth discussions of Schulz's graphics and drawings began to appear only in the 1980s. Whereas Jerzy Ficowski's archaeological approach led to the discovery and gradual publication of a wide variety of Schulz drawings and graphics (Ficowski 1967, 1975, 1988), the first researcher to map out a more scientific approach to Schulz's artwork was Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak (1979, 1981, 1986). Her exploratory research eventually amounted to the inclusion of a wide range of art-related entries in the Bruno Schulz dictionary (Bolecki, Jarzębski and Rosiek 2003).

For a long time, critical discussions of Schulz's artwork have tended to remain in line with some of the main ideas expressed in Witkacy's well-known "written interview" with Schulz ('An Interview with Bruno Schulz' and 'An Essay for S.I. Witkiewicz', Witkiewicz 1935). On the one hand, Schulz's bold assertion of "having expressed [him]self more fully in [his] literary works" has been an incentive for many critics to treat his graphics and drawings as mere preliminaries to his literary works. On the other hand, Witkacy's characterization of Schulz as a "demonologist" has paralleled a strong interest in the position of obsessive eroticism in Schulz's pictorial output. From a biographical perspective, Schulz's "demonological" art has tended to be linked to the artist's personal obsessions and erotic perversions. In art-historical terms, the issue of demonic femininity and male masochism has often been discussed within the context of fin de siècle decadence and grotesque art (Kasjaniuk 1993, Kulig-Janarek 1994, Kitowska-Łysiak 1994). Much attention has been paid, then, to Schulz's artistic and thematic affinity with a wide variety of predecessors such as Francisco Goya, Aubrey Beardsley, Félicien Rops, etc.

Notwithstanding the seemingly monothematic, anachronistic and repetitive character of Schulz's graphics and drawings, the "pictorial" branch of Schulzology has gained more prominence and relevance in recent years. First of all, it has been pointed out that his illustrative works are more than mere illustrations and add a particular twist to his fiction (Wysłouch 1992, Shallcross 1994). Also, in line with similar developments in the discussion of Schulz's fiction, increasing attention has been drawn to the function of Jewish and Judaist elements in Schulz's graphics and drawings, particularly kabbalistic messianism (Panas 1997, 2001). Apart from that, the repetitive character of Schulz's pencil sketches and drawings has been increasingly differentiated from the more complex character of his early graphics (Van Heuckelom 2006, Kato 2009). To a certain extent, the aforementioned research currents seem to reflect the main shift that took place in the discussion of Schulz's fiction, moving from mimetic approaches (focusing on the reality represented) toward more

reflexive approaches (focusing on the process of representation). Emblematic for a more balanced approach toward Schulz's artwork is Sikorski (2004), whose critical discussion of Schulz's "symbolical world" draws both on Schulz's literary and pictorial works. Although Schulz's artwork will perhaps always remain in the shadow of his fiction, there seems to be a growing consensus that his graphics are artistic works in their own right rather than constituting a mere backdrop to his literary works.

With regard to Schulz's fiction, another popular critical strategy has been to compare Schulz's works to an ever-increasing number of well- and less-known writers and literary trends. Parallel to this, the literary historical role of Schulz had to be reconsidered. Back in the 1980s, this issue had been already addressed by Jerzy Jarzębski, who proposed to locate the works of such "atypical avant-gardists" (1987: 160) as Schulz, Gombrowicz, and Witkacy "in either a broadly-conceived modernism or as a particular tendency in an equally widely-conceived avant-garde" (161). A few years later, then, Jarzębski signaled a shift in critical attention from Schulz as a modernist to Schulz as a postmodernist (1994a: 14) – which is also a shift from the idealism of 'Mityzacja rzeczywistości' ('The Mythologizing of Reality') to the ironic stance of 'An Essay for S.I. Witkiewicz', and from the cycle 'Traktat o manekinach' ('Treatise on Tailors' Dummies') to the novella 'Wiosna' ('Spring'). Although this tendency to treat Schulz as a harbinger of postmodernism was soon (and with good reason) criticized (cf. Bolecki 1999, Shallcross 1997: 255), stories such as 'Księga' ('The Book'), 'Genialna epoka' ('The Age of Genius'), and 'Spring' proved to be extremely receptive to (more or less) poststructuralist readings (cf. Czabanowska-Wróbel 2001, Głowacka 1998, 1999 [1996], Hyde 1992, Kośny 1995, Lachmann 1992, 1999 [1996], Markowski 1994, Ritz 1993, Rybicka 2000, Schönle 1998, Stala 1993, Waszak 2002).

No matter how interesting the discussion of Schulz's literary historical position may be, it is unclear whether or not it adds something substantial to our understanding of Schulz's creative output. Indeed, as the pile of Schulzological writings keeps growing and growing, we should ask ourselves if there is any clear research agenda behind this occasionally blind worship of Schulz. Or, in plain words: what is it that makes us devote so much energy to the analysis of this quantitatively modest body of stories and graphic works? In order to gain an insight into this crucial problem of Schulzology, we should take a look at what some other critics have said about the problematic reception of Schulz's fiction. In his groundbreaking monograph, *On the Margins of Reality: the Paradoxes of Representation in Bruno Schulz's Fiction*, Krzysztof Stala comes up with the following observation:

> Why is it that these tales […] so stubbornly resist critical analysis and interpretation? Why do these critical essays only propose some fragmentary, marginal reading, being rather aware of the inexhaustibleness of Schulz's prose than trying to define this inexhaustibleness, domesticate it with some proposal richer than "expression of the inexpressible"? (1993: 1)

What Stala suggests here is that Schulz's stories merely evoke fragmentary, marginal readings which slavishly imitate the language of their subject of research, domesticating it over and over again with such poor proposals as "expression of the inexpressible". According to us, what is hidden behind these readings is the same methodological fallacy which we already mentioned: more often than not, the same set of discursive and metafictional comments uttered in Schulz's stories is used for interpreting these stories, which inevitably leads to a kind of circular (tautological) reasoning. Stala suggests that critics should try more to define Schulz's literary world themselves rather than merely accepting the unreliable interpretative clues which are offered by the "author-like" first-person narrator.

Contrary to Stala, Stanislaw Eile focuses on readings in which Schulz's linguistic world is treated as an open structure which can be filled up with the most extraordinary content:

> Despite many digressions and metafictional comments articulated by the first-person narrator and the main character, his father, the extensive use of figurative language renders [Schulz's] message rather confusing and consequently open to a variety of esoteric readings, which often demonstrate the inventiveness of critics rather than representing a convincing explication of the text. (1996: 97)

Eile seems to signal that such readings often misuse Schulz's equivocal message in order to impose the most far-fetched meaning on it. Whereas the reading strategy discussed by Stala could be called

"description without interpretation", we could consider the one proposed by Eile as "interpretation without description". In the former case, we get critical accounts which describe Schulz's literary world by using its inherent terminology, whereas in the latter case the critic merely singles out what he needs from the text in order to substantiate his interpretation. According to us, the key to the future of Schulzology lies exactly in the liminal space between the two reading strategies: on the one hand, we should continue to scrutinize new and interesting influences and similarities and adopt new methodological frameworks, but on the other hand, we must always start from a clear description of what is actually happening in these stories or in their graphic counterparts.

As we have seen in this brief overview of Schulzological writings, whatever critical scalpel one selects for dissecting Schulz's fiction, there will always be a certain degree of textual resistance which cannot be broken, or in other words, taking off one of Schulz's many masks, one will probably never avoid the impression that a new mask has emerged. Being fully aware of the relativity of each particular reading, the present volume aims to contribute to what we believe are the three main currents in Schulzology: *combinations* with other writers, trends, and traditions, *fragmentations* within new historical and theoretical contexts, and *reintegrations* of the ultimate sense of Schulz's artistic universe. In addition, the book sets out to explore all of Schulz's creative output (i.e. his stories as well as his graphic, epistolary and even literary critical works), as one of Schulz's main goals was to cross artificially set up boundaries between, among other things, different artistic media of expression. In this way, the book should be seen as a continuation of the inspiring panels and fruitful discussions at the International Conference "The World of Bruno Schulz/Bruno Schulz and the World: Influences, Similarities, Reception" (Leuven, Belgium, May 25-26, 2007), which was organized in preparation to this volume by its editors.

The first two parts of the book, "New Combinations: Literature" and "New Combinations: Art", offer new comparative approaches to Schulz's artistic legacy. Whereas some contributions further explore the problem of concrete influences on and creative reception of Schulz's oeuvre, other articles present authors, trends and traditions which share typological similarities with his works. A first selection delves into the Jewish background of Schulz and his writings. Karen Underhill's contribution sheds new light on Schulz's ambivalent relationship with Jewish tradition by bringing into view the artistic and intellectual currents prominent within the generation of acculturated, "de-racinated" Jews to which Schulz belonged (including Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem and Franz Kafka). Andrea Meyer-Fraatz's article draws on similar premises but focuses on the problem of assimilation and acculturation within the context of modern Polish literature. In particular, she draws an interesting comparison between the diverging strategies of "literary" assimilation embodied by Schulz and his contemporary Bolesław Leśmian. Sławomir Jacek Żurek in turn discusses the influence of Schulz's usage of "kabbalistic" motifs and ideas on the writings of another Polish author of Jewish descent, Arnold Słucki. Other chapters draw on all kinds of parallels between Schulz's fiction and the works of twentieth-century Polish and foreign writers: Dieter De Bruyn employs the concept of "metafiction" as an interpretative tool for connecting Schulz's stories with Karol Irzykowski's novel *Pałuba* (1903). According to De Bruyn, both authors demonstrate that no matter how hard literature tries to add a third dimension (depth, *signifié*), the reader will always be confronted with the two-dimensional reality of the text (surface, *signifiant*). While directing our attention to the position of Schulz within postwar Polish literature, Anna Śliwa puts Schulz's work next to the poetry of Miron Białoszewski. As her detailed analysis of Schulz's and Białoszewski's "mythologization of the city" shows, the presence of striking (albeit superficial) convergences in the domain of "urban imagery" helps to highlight the *differentia specifica* of Schulz's and Białoszewski's writings. The contributions of Alfred Gall and Dorota Wojda, finally, venture into the domain of world literature and "combine" Schulz's works with respectively Yugoslav and Latin American literature. While Wojda compares Schulz's usage of irony with Gabriel García Marquez's magical realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gall explores Schulzian echoes in the works of Danilo Kiš (in particular the 'Treatise on the Potatoe' chapter from *Hourglass*). As his analysis shows, the sophisticated intertextual play created by Kiš functions as a literary response to the Shoa.

The second, art-related series of "combinations" starts with Marta Skwara's elaborate discussion of the "(wo)man on a sofa" motif that often recurs in Schulz's literary and plastic output. It allows Skwara to highlight the artist's creative, unconventional, and transgressive application of traditional schemes and motifs. Schulz's position as a (non-)traditional artist also comes to the fore in

Ariko Kato's contribution, which discusses the masochist and modernist aspects of Schulz's early graphic works in relation to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs*. Jan Zieliński, in turn, draws some interesting thematic and formal parallels between Schulz's works and the paintings of one of his favorite artists, the Basque Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta. The issue of typological similarities between Schulz and other Modernist artists (in terms of biography and artistic practice) is central to Esther Sánchez-Pardo's article on the American writer and visual artist Djuna Barnes. Daniel Watt's closing article exposes the "incomparable reality" of Schulz's stories by examining theatrical and cinematic "adaptations" of his works (for instance the Quay Brothers' *Street of Crocodiles*).

In the third part of the book, "Further Fragmentations", detailed studies of single ideas or motives or of hitherto unnoticed subtexts will demonstrate once more that Schulz's artistic universe allows for ever new fragmentary approaches, which merely reinforce its superficial polyvalence without ever disclosing its semantic core. The first of these approaches, as proposed by Mieczysław Dąbrowski, is a discussion of Schulz's works through the prism of the aesthetics of melancholy, which closely cooperates with the ironic aspects of Schulz's writings. Another analytical approach is taken by Jerzy Jarzębski, who focuses on the "seductive activities" performed by the protagonists of Schulz's stories and by the author himself. Shlomit Gorin in turn proposes to reconsider Schulz's works from the perspective of the absurd. A strongly psychoanalytic stance is taken in Marta Suchańska-Drażyńska's contribution which relates the parallels between Schulz's works and Freudian psychoanalysis to their common Jewish roots. Jörg Schulte's contribution reconsiders Schulz's knowledge of Greek mythology and cosmology by focusing on the recurrent usage of breath and wind metaphors throughout Schulz's stories. The article by Thomas Anessi is strongly concerned with literary sociological matters and discusses Schulz's paradoxical position of a writer both disconnected from and connected with the literary center of his time. While Anessi's analysis focuses on Schulz's links with Warsaw literary and cultural circles in the 1930s, Oksana Weretiuk's contribution focuses on the particular reception of Schulz's work in its "peripheral" place of origin, particularly among Ukrainian artists, writers, scholars, and the general public from the 1930s to the present.

The last part of the book, "Ultimate Reintegrations", attempts to gather all these bits and scraps of a unity long gone, "like fragments of a broken mirror" (dixit Schulz), in order to reintegrate our picture of Schulz's artistic world. It remains to be seen, however, whether these final remarks conclude once and for all the ongoing discussion on Schulz's essence, or if they bring new problematic issues into existence. According to Michał Paweł Markowski, central to Schulz's ironical universe is the permanent deconstruction of apparent oppositions, such as the metaphysical dualism between essences and appearances and the opposition between high and low culture. Theodosia Robertson perceives a close link between Schulz's early graphics and his later stories in the sense that they both aim to establish a form of intimate communication between the artist and his "select" audience. Alfred Sproede's contribution breaks with the image of Schulz as a respectful propagator of Hasidic and kabbalistic thought by relating the author's particular re-enactment of Hasidic tales and motifs to his dispute with the avant-garde movement. Janis Augsburger, finally, links the interpretative openness of Schulz's fiction to the intellectual eclecticism that lies at the heart of his writings.

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