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“The Lie Always Rises to the Surface like Oil”. Toward a Metafictional Reading of Karol Irzykowski's *Patuba* and Bruno Schulz's Fiction

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Abstract: In this article, Karol Irzykowski's canonical autothematic novel *Patuba* (1903) is confronted with Bruno Schulz's multifaceted fiction. Whereas *Patuba*, with its dominant discursive layer, has been systematically received as an autothematic novel, Schulz's stories, with their manifold form, keep resisting any similar interpretative model. However, free of the yoke of their seemingly univocal self-informing tendency (Irzykowski) or of their supposed ultimate inexhaustibility (Schulz), these texts emerge as representations of a similar literary critical discourse. On this metafictional level, they incessantly display a significant interaction between the conventional illusion of a third dimension (depth, *signifié*) and the reflexive consciousness of the inevitable two-dimensionality of the text (surface, *signifiant*).

Introduction: From *Autotematyzm* To Metafiction

In almost every national tradition one can find literary works whose titles are referred to all the time, but which are hardly ever read from cover to cover. It goes without saying that Joyce's *Ulysses* is the classic example of such “most unread novels”. One of the most obvious Polish specimens, however, is undoubtedly Karol Irzykowski's highly experimental novel *Patuba* (1903). Although *Patuba* has been referred to as an important literary composition by generations of critics and readers alike, one could posit that only few people actually know what the novel is all about. Even those critics who have tried to grasp the novel's main ideas seem to have difficulty getting to its very core. The same certainly holds true for both of Bruno Schulz's collections of stories, *Sklepy cynamonowe* (*Cinnamon Shops*, 1934) and *Sanatorium pod klepsydrą* (*Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*; 1937),¹ of which Stanislaw Eile has correctly remarked that “the extensive use of figurative language renders [the] 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). It seems that both *Patuba* and Schulz's complete fiction, notwithstanding their many differences in form and content, at least share one particular feature: in both cases, the reader is faced with a certain formal residue, some kind of narrative distortion, which causes a continual postponement of the text's explication.

Despite this common characteristic, hardly any attempt has been made to propose a similar reading of both Irzykowski and Schulz. This is all the more surprising if one takes into consideration the many literary critical accounts, in which both authors are treated as belonging to the same experimental or avant-garde vein of Polish Modernism (e.g. Taylor Sen 1972, Nycz 1997, Bolecki 1999). The main reason for the absence of one single approach to both Irzykowski and Schulz (apart from the aforementioned general literary historical categories) is of course the completely different impression which these authors' texts make at first glance. For many years, due to its heterogeneous structure and its peremptory self-informing layer,² *Patuba* could only be “naturalized” with recourse to

¹ All further references to these collections will be given as SC and SpK. Quotations of the original Polish text are taken from Schulz 1964, the English translations are from Schulz 1989 (hereafter referred to as CF).

² The novel consists of five different parts: the introductory novella ‘Sny Marii Dunin (palimpsest)’ (‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin (A Palimpsest)’), in which an anonymous archaeologist reports how he was initiated into the hidden “Brotherhood of the Great Bell” (“Bractwo Wielkiego Dzwonu”), then fell in love with the leader's daughter Maria, and eventually married her sister Hermina, after which the narrator admits that the entire story is a falsification; the “actual” novel ‘Patuba (studium

the concept of *autotematyzm* or, more specifically, to the genre of the “powieść autotematyczna” (“autothematic novel”). Since it was first introduced by the famous literary critic Artur Sandauer, the concept of *autotematyzm* has made a stunning career in Polish criticism, which eventually led to its complete exhaustion (cf. De Bruyn 2007a). The problem with this term is that it mainly focuses on explicit thematizations of the artistic genesis and the textual process, thus excluding more implicit techniques of literary reflexivity. Furthermore, by treating such self-informing tendencies in literary texts as fully reliable approaches to the same literary texts, propagators of *autotematyzm* usually end up in a kind of circular reasoning: discursive parts of a certain text are used in order to elucidate the same text. Due to this methodological fallacy, for instance, Irzykowski’s truly *equivocal* anti-Modernist³ commentaries were interpolated rather *unequivocally* into many literary critical accounts, so that *Pałuba* started functioning as a univocal, more or less novelistic *critique* of conventional literary techniques and reading habits, rather than as an extraordinary artistic *representation* of the highly sophisticated literary critical self-consciousness of the author.⁴

Schulz’s fiction, on the other hand, even though it contains a similar but less dominant and univocal self-informing layer, has hardly ever been read as an example of “autothematic” writing. At the same time, however, this most enigmatic collection of narrative pieces has posed even larger interpretative problems. Immediately after its publication in the 1930’s, as Włodzimierz Bolecki has sufficiently proved, Schulz’s prose conflicted with the horizon of expectations of most Polish critics in two particular ways: “First, it urged to violate the generally accepted rules for reading epic literature, and second – it aroused such readerly reactions which were reserved for reading lyrical works” (“Po pierwsze, zmuszała do pogwałcenia społecznie zaakceptowanych reguł czytania epiki, po drugie – wywoływała takie reakcje czytelnicze, jakie zarezerwowano dla lektury utworów lirycznych”; 1996 [1982]: 304). It could be argued that this twofold orientation holds true to a certain extent for the majority of critical readings of Schulz’s fiction up to now. Whereas “poetic” or “logocentric” readings of this prose generally do injustice to its narrative core, any approach starting from the rules and conventions of traditional epic literature will always struggle with the many narrative inconsistencies in the stories under scrutiny.⁵ Consequently, as Krzysztof Stala has argued, too many critics limit themselves to “some fragmentary, marginal reading, being rather aware of the inexhaustibility of Schulz’s prose than trying to define this inexhaustibility, domesticate it with some proposal richer than ‘expression of the inexpressible’” (1993: 1). One of the main reasons for this difficult critical reception is that many of these interpretations are methodologically fallacious in much the same way as the already mentioned “autothematic” readings of *Pałuba*. Again, discursive parts of the text are interpolated rather recklessly in the critic’s account as reliable sources for interpreting the same text. As a result, many of these readings are, indeed, merely marginal commentaries on the text’s discursive dimension rather than thorough analyses of the text as a literary representation.

In recent years, some scholars have tried to establish new ways of interpreting the formal or “nonnarrative” residue which both authors’ texts clearly display. In one way or another, all these attempts build on an earlier interpretative model by Włodzimierz Bolecki. In what is undoubtedly the most valuable and comprehensive study on the narrative prose of such interwar writers as Bruno Schulz, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), and Witold Gombrowicz, Bolecki (1996 [1982]) for the first time focuses on generations of readers’ difficulties to construct a consistent story world out of these most alienating and unusually discursive narrative accounts rather than repeating once more the texts’ main philosophical ideas, presenting themselves in the ready-made form of unequivocal self-commentaries. 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

biograficzne’ (*Pałuba* (A Biographical Study)), which tells the story of Piotr Strumieński’s married life with Angelika and, after her suicide, with Ola; and three explanatory essays, respectively entitled ‘Uwagi do *Pałuby*’ (*Remarks to Pałuba*), ‘Wyjaśnienie *Snów Marii Dunin* i związek ich z *Pałubą*’ (*An Explanation of The Dreams of Maria Dunin and Its Connection with Pałuba*), and ‘*Szaniec Pałuby*’ (*The Rampart of Pałuba*). The point to note is that even the actual novel consists mainly of explanatory digressions, discussing, for example, the protagonists’ psychology and – most prominently – the form of the novel which is being written.

³ In this case, “anti-Modernist” refers to the traditional Polish interpretation of literary Modernism, according to which this current is limited to the early, 1890-1900 period of *Młoda Polska*, instead of encompassing the entire 1890-1930 period.

⁴ This tradition includes such postwar critical works as Wyka 1977 [1948], Lipiński 1949, Zengel 1958, Dąbrowska 1963, Werner 1965, Głowiński 1969, Stepnik 1973, Taylor Sen 1972, Budrecka 1981, Drozdowski 1987, and Eile 1996: 42-45.

⁵ Cf. the introduction to this volume for a critical discussion of the key figures and important currents in Schulzology.

“vehicular prose model” (“wehikularny model prozy”; 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). What the critic is aiming at is not necessarily the numerous metapoetic utterances in many of these works but first and foremost a manifest “semiotic over-organization” (“nadorganizacja znakowa”; 13) on all narrative levels – i.e., including the lexical (stylistic) as well as the compositional, fabular, or semantic structure of the text. Although Bolecki explicitly excludes *Patuba* from his “poetical prose model” for reasons of periodization and because of the alleged “cognitive uniformity of the narration” (“jednolitość poznawcza narracji”; 92), the novel will later return in his critical writings as an important predecessor of this “poetical” vein of Polish Modernist fiction because of its reflexive, parodic and grotesque attitude toward literary conventions (cf. Bolecki 1999, 2003).

The idea of a “parodic-grotesque current” (“nurt parodystyczno-groteskowy”) that connects *Patuba* with the fiction of Schulz, Witkacy and Gombrowicz was further developed by Brygida Pawłowska-Jądrzyk (1995: 155). According to her, the “autothematic” character of Irzykowski’s novel has always overshadowed its parodic and grotesque effects. In order to restore the balance, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk draws attention to the parodic evocation of existing literary conventions in all kinds of (either literally or figuratively) inserted “texts” (i.e., both Strumieński’s and Gasztold’s literary projects *Księga miłości* (*The Book of Love*) and *Chora miłość* (*A Sick Love*), and the introductory novella ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’) as well as to the eventual self-parodic attitude toward the evolving novelistic product itself. More important, though, is the use of the grotesque as a parodic device. Whereas most critics had focused predominantly on the discursive (or the narrator’s) level of the text, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk for the first time stresses the (less overtly) parodic function of its narrative and stylistic structure. On the level of the story, for instance, she perceives a recurrent grotesque transformation of “sublimity” (“wzniosłość”) into “stupidity” (“śmieszność”; 156), as in the scene where Piotr Strumieński kisses Berestajka while observing a centipede on the wall (cf. Irzykowski 1976 [1903]: 339).⁶ Furthermore, both on the discursive and the narrative level of the text, the critic observes a grotesque deformation of conventional literary language, e.g. through the use of awkward neologisms and strained metaphors, through the deliberate combination of different stylistic registers, or more simply by incessantly putting typical phrases between ironic quotation marks (161-163). According to Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, it is exactly this particular combination of grotesque scenes with a systematic use of the “linguistic grotesque” (“groteska lingwistyczna”; 161) which makes *Patuba* similar to Schulz’s fiction. Indeed, whereas the presence of grotesque situations in the latter’s stories is self-evident, his baroque style reaches a comparable degree of “semiotic over-organization” through a continuous flow of metaphors.

In a book-length study on the entire “parodic-grotesque current” in Polish Modernism, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk further develops her initial findings on Irzykowski’s novel. More specifically, she introduces the concept of “mediocrity” (“bylejakość”) as a new interpretative tool. “Mediocrity (in a descriptive, and not in an axiological sense)”, she argues, “is a term which is used for denoting the specificity of the poetics of works which stand out with a deliberate carelessness of their artistic execution” (“Bylejakość’ (w znaczeniu opisowym, a nie oceniającym) to termin stosowany [...] dla określenia swoistości poetyki utworów wyróżniających się celową niedbałością wykonania artystycznego”; 2002: 89). In her classification of devices of mediocrity, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk makes a distinction between “static motives” (“motywy statyczne”), such as the representation of “shoddy” objects or physical deficiencies, and “dynamic motives” (“motywy dynamiczne”), such as inadequacies in the narrative structure of the text (90-91). Whereas the “static” version of the poetics of mediocrity brings to mind Schulz’s fascination with *tandeta* (“trash”), a more “dynamic” approach can be discerned in *Patuba*. More specifically, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk stresses the central role of the “‘anti-aesthetic’ word-symbol” (“‘antyestetyczne’ słowo-symbol”; 105) *patuba* in Irzykowski’s poetics.⁷ Unlike *tandeta*, she argues, the concept of *patuba* induces a dynamics of “mediocrity” on

⁶ All further references will be given as P.

⁷ *Patuba* is a dialectal form in Polish, which may take on a lot of meanings. Irzykowski continuously plays with this polysemy in his novel (cf. infra). Quite surprisingly, the enormous poetical relevance of the word has been underestimated by virtually all earlier critics. Moreover, as we have seen, critics tend to limit themselves to some kind of critical repetition of those discursive parts of the texts in which the meaning of *patuba* is discussed by the narrating “author” (i.e. the “author-like”

several levels of the text of the novel.⁸ Of course, *Patuba* as a whole, with its intricate heterogeneous structure, is already a “shoddy” artifact in itself, but what Pawłowska-Jądrzyk is particularly aiming at is the interplay between the level of the story and the level of the narration. On the level of the story, Piotr Strumieński and the other protagonists cannot but accept that their conventional ideals (of love, fidelity, etc.) are constantly compromised by the very nature of everyday reality. On the level of the narration, this conflict is described as the clash between the “constructive element” (“pierwiastek konstrukcyjny”) and the “palubic’ element” (“pierwiastek pałubiczny”). As a result, a dual dynamics of “mediocrity” is generated:

Demaskowanie stereotypów i zafalszowań odbywa się w utworze na drodze dyskursywnej rewizji fantazmatów (metoda wiwisekcji), a także poprzez fabularne sprowadzanie ich *ad absurdum*, w czym nieocenione usługi oddają pisarzowi parodia i groteska. Obydwie wymienione płaszczyzny dzieła – narracyjna i fabularna – stanowią domenę swoiście pojętej “bylejakości”. (106)

(In the work, the unmasking of stereotypes and imitations is implemented not only through the discursive revision of the phantasms (method of vivisection) but also by leading them *ad absurdum* on the level of the story, in which the writer receives valuable support of the devices of parody and grotesque. On both the levels mentioned above – of the narration and of the story – a specifically conceived “mediocrity” comes to the surface.)

In other words, by introducing the idea of a poetics of “mediocrity”, Pawłowska-Jądrzyk now gives a more particular interpretation of the “parodic-grotesque” clash between the ideal (sense) and reality (chaos) in such novels as *Patuba* – a problem which she had already touched upon in her earlier writings.

No matter how valuable Pawłowska-Jądrzyk’s notion of the poetics of mediocrity might be for the critical reassessment of the fiction of such writers as Irzykowski, Schulz, Gombrowicz, and Witkacy, the focus of her analysis is predominantly on these works’ “predisposition to the extra-discursive evocation of philosophical contents” (“predyspozycja do pozadyskursywnego ewokowania treści filozoficznych”; 5), or, more specifically, on their search for some ultimate *signifié* that is behind the represented chaos of reality. What she seems to overlook, however, is that these works’ protest against any schematic rendering of reality is eventually directed against the evolving literary product itself. In other words, the represented “migration of forms” (“wędrownia form”; Schulz 1964: 682) – the chaos of reality – is strongly interrelated with the representing “dispersion of *signifiants*” – the chaos of language. As we have seen, in order to go behind this problematic signifying form, Bolecki proposes a “poetic” reading of these narrative works. As Krzysztof Kłosiński has argued, however, by introducing this “new, alternative readability” (“nowa [...], alternatywna czytelność”), Bolecki in fact tactfully evades the often indicated problem of the “unreadability” (“nieczytelność”) and the subsequent “incomprehensibility” (“niezrozumialstwo”) of these extraordinary fictions (2000: 20). According to Kłosiński, these texts are never completely “unreadable” or “incomprehensible”. What should be done, then, is exactly to define this complicating factor, this paradoxical “growth” (“narost”; 21) or “formal residue” (cf. supra). In his paper, Kłosiński proposes to use the notion of “stylization” (“stylizacja”; 21).

What makes Kłosiński’s analysis particularly interesting, is that it points at *Patuba* as the first Polish novel which explicitly discusses its own “stylized character” (“stylizacyjny charakter”; 24). On the second last page, more exactly, one can read as follows:

A teraz gdy się wie, jaką *Patuba* nie jest, pojmie się też, czym ona jest: Jest ona monstrualną ruiną – a i to *tylko stylizowana*. Czy tak jak ją powinno się pisać każde dzieło? Czy to jest program poezji, poezji przyszłości? I znów mamy błędne koło. Wszakże program *Patuby* dotyczy tylko jej samej, znika razem z nią. W każdym dziele autor na nowo bierze rozmach i na nowo stosunkuje się do kwestii “poezji” [...], dzieło jest tylko śladem tego stosunkowania się. (P 586; italics mine)

(So, now that we know what *Patuba* is not like, it should also be clear what it is: it is a monstrous ruin – be it merely a stylized one. Should every work be written like this one? Is this the program of poetry, of the poetry of

narrator who incessantly comments on the story told). One of the few exceptions can be found in Ewa Szary-Matywiecka’s brilliant, though quite idiosyncratic, monograph on the Polish “autothematic novel”, in which this symbolic keyword is even considered to be a forerunner of Sandauer’s concept of *autotematyzm* (1979: 13-18).

⁸ As I will demonstrate in the last section of this article, the concept of *tandeta* in fact lies at the basis of an intricate semiotic “dynamics” as well.

the future? And again we have a vicious circle. Indeed, the program of *Pałuba* only touches the work itself – it expires together with it. In each work the author gathers momentum again and once more determines his position about the question of “poetry” – the work is merely a trace of this act of positioning.)

In this fragment, Irzykowski not only puts into perspective his own destructive literary practice (“it is a monstrous ruin – be it merely a stylized one”) but also clearly describes the technique of stylization: its function is to somehow put into words what in fact cannot be put into words, to show what precedes its verbal phase, to “reveal its own usurping nature” (“ujawnić swoje uzurpatorstwo”; Kłosiński 2000: 24). In this way, stylization mediates between what the literary work eventually conveys (a text which is merely a “trace”) and the creative process by which it is preceded (the “positioning” of the author toward the question of poetry). Whereas the majority of literary texts tend to create the illusion of a particular reality or a particular meaning – thus concealing their “own usurping nature” (toward reality, toward meaning), – the technique of stylization makes this “lie” to come to the surface.⁹

In my opinion, what all these approaches of the specificity of the experimental vein of twentieth-century Polish fiction share is, in fact, a particular sensitivity to these texts’ reflexivity. More specifically, each particular approach focuses on certain textual signals which – to a larger extent than in more conventional works of fiction – refer to their own literary (linguistic, fictional) form: to their own poetics (*poetyckość*), to their own deformity (*groteskowość*), to the “carelessness of their own artistic execution” (*bylejakość*), or to the “usurping nature” of their own language (*stylizacja*). At the same time, critics have always been conscious of the presence of explicit “autothematic” statements in the majority of these texts. Due to the conceptual rigidity of the notion of *autotematyzm*, however, no attempts have been made to link together both these reflexive techniques, i.e. the inclusion of “autothematic” comments and the more implicit device of “foregrounding” certain literary conventions. Of course, one could quite simply treat all these works within the framework of literary reflexivity, but due to the wide variety and omnipresence of reflexive devices in all of them, it seems better to introduce the concept of *metafiction* as a new literary critical tool. Unlike *autotematyzm* (which suggests a thematic subgenre) and reflexivity (which primarily denotes the general device), metafiction emphasizes the permanent bifurcation of the fictional discourse into a referential and a reflexive level (cf. Waugh’s definition of metafiction as “the construction of a fictional illusion [...] and the laying bare of that illusion”; 1984: 6). More exactly, whereas *autotematyzm* manifests itself in the form of a separate metalinguistic discourse beside the common discourse of the object language, metafiction can best be defined as a specific “borderline discourse [...] between fiction and criticism” (Currie 1995: 2) that is represented in the text in ever varying manners. In fact, these different textual devices (either forms of *foregrounding* or forms of commentary) are merely *representations* of a discourse that, on the other side of the borderline between fiction and criticism, should be answered with a similarly self-conscious literary critical discourse.

With regard to Irzykowski and Schulz, the question is whether the metafictional discourse that their respective texts represent in a different way bears certain resemblances. Do both metafictional projects stem from a (more or less) similar attitude toward the essence of literary practice? In order to answer this question, one could start from Pałowska-Jądrzyk’s hypothesis that what is behind the grotesque strategies of both authors is the philosophical ambition to grasp the sense (*sens*) of the chaos of reality. Applied to literary practice, one could posit that both authors show a specific interest in the dynamics between surface (the text) and depth (meaning, sense). What they seem to diagnose is that no matter how hard literature, by analogy with reality itself, tries to add a third dimension (depth, *signifié*), the reader will always be confronted with the two-dimensional reality of the text (surface, *signifiant*). In order to substantiate my hypothesis, I will first focus on those textual features which expose the search for depth, for illusion or representation, and then on the various ways in which this pursuit is disillusioned by a foregrounding of the textual surface, of the materiality of the text. In the concluding section, I will argue that this metafictional dynamics between depth and surface crystallizes, as it were, into such reflexive metaphors as *pałuba*, *manekin*, and *tandeta*.

⁹ As Kłosiński correctly remarks, the “stylistic over-organization” – to use a variant of Bolecki’s notion of “semiotic over-organization” – is not limited to the narrative level of *Pałuba* because on the discursive level one may come across many passages in which the “narrating author” loses himself in a mixture of various discursive styles.

Irzykowski and Schulz between Surface and Depth

In their respective works, both Schulz and Irzykowski push forward the absolute “truth” as an almost unattainable ideal. More specifically, the ill-fated ambition to get to the core or the essence of things is characteristic of the tragicomic fate of several of their protagonists. In Schulz’s stories, the search for truth is the main preoccupation of both Jacob and Joseph; whereas the former is often busy with carrying out the most subversive experiments, the latter is repeatedly depicted when undertaking bizarre nightly quests. Examples of Jacob’s experiments can be found in such stories as ‘Ptaki’ (‘Birds’) and ‘Komety’ (‘The Comet’); characteristic of his endeavours is that they are systematically thwarted by Adela, who represents the conventional order of everyday reality. Joseph, on the other hand, is struggling with the labyrinthine quality of (nocturnal) reality in such oft-discussed stories as ‘Sklepy cynamonowe’ (‘Cinnamon Shops’), ‘Ulica krokodyli’ (‘The Street of Crocodiles’), ‘Wiosna’ (‘Spring’), and ‘Sanatorium pod klepsydrą’ (‘Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass’). During these journeys, the world reveals itself to the young Joseph as an arbitrary configuration of signs which misleads him again and again. In ‘Cinnamon Shops’, for instance, the boy is incessantly led away from his initial goal to visit the “cinnamon shops” with their exotic goods. His journey brings him to a series of imaginary places (dark streets, a gymnasium, an art room, the principal’s private rooms, etc.) that momentarily seem to materialize, after which they merge into something new. After a final ride in a carriage, the boy ends up somewhere on the countryside while being completely under the spell of the mystery of the night.

Whereas ‘Cinnamon Shops’ comes to an end with a timid prostration for the nocturnal element, the novella ‘Spring’ leads Joseph into a complete fiasco due to the protagonist’s usurping attitude toward fictional reality. Though he wanted to win Bianca for himself, Joseph cannot but come to the conclusion that his manipulation of the course of events has eventually lead to the successful seduction of Bianca by Rudolph:

W zaślepieniu moim podjąłem się wykładu pisma, chciałem być tłumaczem woli boskiej, w fałszywym natchnieniu chwyciłem przemykające przez markownik ślepe poszlaki i kontury. Łączyłem je niestety tylko w dowolną figurę. Narzuciłem tej wiosnie moją reżyserię, podłożyłem pod jej nie objęty rozkwit własny program i chciałem ją nagiąć, pokierować według własnych planów. (SpK 264)

(In my blindness, I undertook to comment on the text, to be the interpreter of God’s will; I misunderstood the scanty traces and indications I believed I found in the pages of the stamp album. Unfortunately, I wove them into a fabric of my own making. I have imposed [...] my own direction upon this spring, I devised my own program to explain its immense flourishing and wanted to harness it, to direct it according to my own ideas; TCF 202)

Similar tragic attempts to grasp reality and lay bare its “truth” appear in numerous variants in *Pałuba*, too. The most striking examples are, of course, the subsequent “próby w głąb” (“attempts to get to the core”) that are undertaken by Piotr Strumieński in order to get to the bottom of the mystery of his first marriage (the so-called “Angelika case” or *sprawa Angeliki*). While trying to sort out the past and to uphold the ideal of absolute, platonic love, however, he is permanently thwarted by the sensual aspect of love, which systematically leads him away from his “underground life” (“podziemne życie”) and incites him to have sexual relations. Irzykowski represents this conflict discursively by means of the dialectics between the “constructive element” (“pierwiastek konstrukcyjny”) and the “*palubic* element” (“pierwiastek pałubiczny”), which in fact refers to the struggle between nature and culture in man.¹⁰ The same dynamics of delving in search of a particular core without eventually disclosing it reappears in the introductory novella ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’ in the form of the allegorical digging for the Great Bell. In this case, the victim is Maria Dunin, who comes so close to the ideal of platonic love, that the Brotherhood of the Great Bell has no other option than to sentence her to death, since its paradoxical task is exactly to suggest the existence of the ideal (by digging for the Great Bell) while simultaneously hiding its secret (that is, the nonexistence of the Great Bell) for humanity.

¹⁰ This kind of oppositions is, of course, particularly important in Schulz’s stories as well (cf. the struggle between Jacob and Adela). Cf. Bolecki 2005 and Ritz 2005 for recent discussions of gender aspects in Irzykowski and Schulz.

By repeatedly representing the tragedy of striving for the ideal, both Irzykowski and Schulz appear to be conscious of the inevitable fiasco of the enterprise. The same consciousness of this striving being eventually led away by other motives manifests itself even more distinctly on the discursive level of the respective texts. Toward the end of Schulz's story 'Manekiny' ('Tailors' Dummies'), for example, the narrator reports that

[j]est godne uwagi, jak w zetknięciu z niezwykłym tym człowiekiem rzeczy wszystkie cofały się niejako do korzenia swego bytu, odbudowywały swe zjawisko aż do metafizycznego jądra, wracały niejako do pierwotnej idei, ażeby w tym punkcie sprzeniewierzyć się jej i przechylić w te wątpliwe, ryzykowne i dwuznaczne regiony, które nazwiemy tu krótko regionami wielkiej herezji. (SC 79)

([i]t is worth noting how, in contact with that strange man, all things reverted, as it were, to the roots of their existence, rebuilt their outward appearance anew from their metaphysical core, returned to the primary idea, in order to betray it at some point and to turn into the doubtful, risky, and equivocal regions which we shall call for short the Regions of the Great Heresy; CF 30)

In other words, any attempt at "getting to the core" is presented as some kind of heresy, as an improper usurpation that must necessarily lead to deviations. In *Patuba* this same idea is depicted as a self-regulating mechanism in man. In 'The Dreams of Maria Dunin' the principle of self-regulation is represented in an allegorical way in the form of the "Hall of the Manometers" ("Hala Manometrów") where Acheronta Movebo, the leader of the Brotherhood, monitors a series of manometers that are connected with reality in order to check whether the pressure of mankind on the "ideal" is still under control. As soon as the pressure starts to be threatening, the Brotherhood disposes of the principle of the "Safety Valve" ("Kłapa Bezpieczeństwa") in order to keep the secret of the Great Bell. Maria Dunin could be called the most prominent victim of this principle: eliminating her should rescue the rest of mankind.

Whereas the mechanism is merely suggested in guarded terms in the mysterious novella, its functioning is described at large in 'An Explanation of *The Dreams of Maria Dunin* and Its Connection with *Patuba*'. The starting point is the "theory that certain ideals, as well as the sciences and finally also love and poetry, contain a centrifugal element; if they would be taken seriously and carried through to the end, they would have to destroy man" ("teoria, że niektóre ideały, dalej nauki, wreszcie miłość i poezja mają w sobie pierwiastek odśrodkowy, bo wzięte na serio i przeprowadzone aż do końca, musiałyby zniszczyć człowieka"; P 565). This theory can be linked with the old manuscript from 'The Dreams of Maria Dunin', which contains the warning that "earth is covered with a certain fluid, the existence of which existence nobody knows but which will ignite once, on some small point, shaken up by the tones of the awoken Bell and blow up the world" ("w świecie rozlane jest pewne fluidum, o którego istnieniu nikt nie wie, które jednak kiedyś na jakimś małym punkcie, wstrząśnięte dźwiękami zbudzonego Dzwonu, zapłonie i świat rozsadzi"; P 28). This is exactly what makes Maria Dunin's behavior so threatening: by taking the ideal of platonic love so seriously, she is drawn apart from her human core by a centrifugal element. Her death is a safety valve that should save the rest of mankind. In order to counter their own disintegration, however, real human beings have their own safety valve at their disposal:

Z pierwiastkiem odśrodkowym walczy jednak pierwiastek dośrodkowy, instynkt samozachowawczy ludzi i świata. Świat wytrzymuje tylko pewne maximum brania rzeczy na serio, w ostatecznej bowiem chwili działa wentyl, który nadmiar wyrzuca, a ideał redukuje do przyzwoitej miary [...] Naturalnie w świecie psychicznym odbywa się funkcjonowanie wentyla mniej lub więcej nieświadomie. Bractwo WD zaś jest jakby uświadomionym działaniem tego instynktu samozachowawczego natury ludzkiej, jego hipostazą, najwyższym centralnym urzędem. (P 565-566)

(The centrifugal element, however, is counteracted by a centripetal element, that is, the instinct for self-preservation of people and the world. The world tolerates only a certain maximum of taking things seriously, since at the very last moment a valve is put into operation, which allows the surplus to escape and reduces the ideal to acceptable dimensions. Obviously, in the psychic world this valve operates more or less unconsciously. The Brotherhood of the GB, then, could be considered the conscious operation of the instinct for self-preservation of human nature, its hypostasis, its highest central body.)

What this passage illustrates is that Piotr Strumieński and the other protagonists from *Patuba* are conditioned by the same mechanism as Maria Dunin. What is demonstrated in 'The Dreams of Maria

Dunin' on the level of the story, by means of the allegorical activities of the Brotherhood, reappears in the actual novel on the level of the narrator's psychoanalytical comments.

In fact, by repeatedly compromising the human pursuit of the ideal, Irzykowski primarily wants to elucidate the complexity of the psychological motives that lie at the basis of all human deeds. In the 'Trio autora' ('Author's Trio') chapter, which seems to be crucial for understanding the poetical principles that govern *Patuba*, this ambition to probe into the "subterranean psychic life" ("podziemne życie psychiczne"; P 447) of man is expressed as follows:

Dotychczasowym błędem było, że sięgano albo za płytko, albo – przeskakując całe życie następcze – za głęboko, tj. tam, gdzie już nic być nie może, i robiono rzekome wizje kosmiczne zamiast uprawiać introspekcję. Mnie się zdaje, że zbadać warstwę na kilkaset metrów pod tzw. powierzchnią duszy – to może wystarczy, nie trzeba szukać nadiru. (P 447)

(Until now, the mistake has been made of probing either not deeply enough, or – while skipping the entire secondary life – too deeply, that is, where nothing can be found anymore, and of producing so-called cosmic visions instead of doing an introspection. In my opinion, it is probably sufficient to probe into the layer a few hundred metres below the so-called surface of the soul – to search for the nadir is rather unnecessary.)

What is suggested here is that by confining oneself to an examination of the human psyche on a "relative" depth, one can gain insight into the problem of "secondary life" – that is, the human habit of organizing life by means of a number of "absolute" concepts (love, truth, faithfulness, etc.) which separate us from "real" life without bringing us closer to the ideals we strive for. The only way, then, to represent the problematic mental life of mankind in literature, or in any verbal form at all, is by continually exposing the relativity of its representation, which can never escape the tension between surface and depth, lie and truth, or *signifiant* and *signifié*.

In their attempt to reveal a certain "truth", whether it is the "soul" (Irzykowski) or "myth" (Schulz), both authors are aware of the inevitable defeat right from the very start. Schulz explains this awareness in his essay for Witkacy:

Węzeł, na który dusza została zasupłana, nie jest fałszywym węzłem, rozchodzącym się za pociągnięciem końca. Przeciwnie, coraz ciaśniej się zwężła. Manipulujemy przy nim, śledzimy bieg nici, szukamy końca i z tych manipulacji powstaje sztuka. (1964: 681)

(The knot the soul got itself tied up in is not a false one that comes undone when you pull the ends. On the contrary, it draws tighter. We handle it, trace the path of the separate threads, look for the end of the string, and out of these manipulations comes art; 1990: 111)

To put it another way, striving for the unattainable ideal while being fully conscious of the inevitable failure of such an attempt, manifests itself most prominently in (or rather as) art. A similar thought is expressed in the continuation of 'An Explanation of *The Dreams of Maria Dunin*':

[Z]właszcza ludzie, którzy najwięcej biją we Wielki Dzwon, więc myśliciele (tacy jak Nietzsche, Ibsen, Schopenhauer) i poeci – u tych funkcjonuje kłapa bezpieczeństwa najwybitniej. W rozstrzygającej chwili cofają się oni przed konsekwencją i mordują Marię Dunin w sobie. (P 566)

(In particular people who ring the Great Bell most often, that is, thinkers (such as Nietzsche, Ibsen, Schopenhauer) and poets – in such people the safety valve functions best. At the critical moment they shrink from the consequences and kill Maria Dunin in themselves.)

What Irzykowski suggests, is that every literary or philosophical work is a construction to the second power, as it additionally renders the ideal, whose representation in man is already problematic, in a closed linguistic form. Although both Schulz and Irzykowski reveal this mechanism in different ways, they continually display the awareness that even their own apparently "open" or "self-conscious" texts are merely constructions; this is why Schulz refers to his own artistic "manipulations" and why the narrating "author" in *Patuba* confesses without hesitation that he also "belongs to the Brotherhood, from which escape is simply impossible" ("[należy] do Bractwa, przed którym w ogóle nie ma ucieczki"; P 568).¹¹

¹¹ In another part of *Patuba*, Irzykowski summarizes the dynamics of the entire novel in the following oft-quoted aphorism: "The lie always rises to the surface like oil, while the truth sinks to the bottom because it is hard and heavy" ("Kłamstwo wypływa na wierzch jak oliwa, prawda opada, bo jest ciężka i trudna"; P 289).

From all this, the question arises why both authors, *despite* their awareness of the inevitable “secondariness” of *every* literary operation, have decided to produce their texts at all. When even the most self-ironical literary form appears to be a construction, and if every attempt to get to the truth eventually exposes its own deceitfulness, is it then not more authentic to simply refuse to create such constructions? In order to find a way out of this tautological circle, it seems important to stress the role of the reader. More specifically, opposed to the “tragedy” of the (stable, definitive) literary product is always the “pleasure” of the three-dimensional (unstable, provisional) reading process. By exposing in various ways their own two-dimensionality (or *grafemiczność* ‘graphemicity’ as Szary-Matywiecka (1979: 6) would call it), both authors’ texts incite the reader to become aware of his/her own “role” in the textual “game”, or of his/her own “pose” which is merely a “comedy”.¹²

Both authors have explicitly stressed the constructive dimension of their destructive literary practices. As to Irzykowski, the following striking self-commentary from *Beniaminek* (*Little Benjamin*; 1933) could be mentioned:

“[D]emaskując” i wyśmiewając bohatera, zsolidaryzowałem się z nim [...] prawie na całej linii, a zasadę swoją wypowiedziałem nawiązując do słów Mignon Goethego (która to mówi, gdy ją przebrano za anioła): “So laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde!” [...] – to znaczy że tzw. komedia, gest, pozór, obłuda itp. mają swoje głębokie uprawnienie. (1976c: 447)

(While “demasking” and making fun of the hero, I had almost complete solidarity with him, and I expressed my point of view by repeating the words of Goethe’s Mignon (who is saying this as she is being dressed up as an angel): “So laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde!” [...] – which means that the so-called comedy, gesture, appearance, hypocrisy and the like are entirely legitimate.)

In his essay for Witkacy, Schulz in a similar way draws on the legitimacy of his destructive practices and on the possibility of deriving some indeterminate kind of pleasure from it:

Jaki jest sens tej uniwersalnej deziluzji rzeczywistości, nie potrafię powiedzieć. Twierdzę tylko, że byłaby ona nie do zniesienia, gdyby nie doznawała odszkodowania w jakiejś innej dymensji. W jakiś sposób doznajemy głębokiej satysfakcji z tego rozluźnienia tkanki rzeczywistości, jesteśmy zainteresowani w tym bankructwie realności. (1964: 683)

(What the meaning of this universal disillusioning reality is I am not able to say. I maintain only that it would be unbearable unless it was compensated for in some other dimension. In some sense we derive a profound satisfaction from the loosening of the web of reality; we feel an interest in witnessing the bankruptcy of reality; 1990: 113)

Although neither Irzykowski nor Schulz mention the actual reader in these passages, they are clearly behaving as “readers” of their own literary world. Only on this level (or in this dimension) of literary communication does it seem possible to escape from the finiteness of the two-dimensional text and to enter into the infinity of the three-dimensional act of reading. Particularly when the text presents itself as a “game”, as a finite repertory of rules (conventions) and signs (words), the reader may partake in it as a “player”, repeating his act of reading over and over again as he pleases. Just like a player in a game is forced to play a particular, provisional role, Schulz’s and Irzykowski’s readers are made aware of their temporary task as “readers”. When determining the most dominant signals by which these texts stress their two-dimensionality, the dynamics of surface and depth once more proves extremely useful: after the texts have revealed themselves as the result of a recursive graphic activity (in the form of palimpsests, cryptograms, or arabesques) in order to break the illusion of the ultimate depth, the horizontal orientation of their literary reality is semantically embedded in two specific metaphors of maximal arbitrariness (*patuba* and *tandeta*). In this way, the (vertical) search for the unique, authentic truth is transformed into the (horizontal) reality of the recursive, inauthentic act of reading.

Palimpsests, Cryptograms, Arabesques. Exegesis of the Unattainable Original

¹² Quite remarkably, such concepts as “comedy” (*komedia*), “role” (*rola*), and “pose” (*poza*) are omnipresent in Irzykowski’s and (to a lesser extent) Schulz’s character descriptions.

As has already been sufficiently demonstrated, Schulz's prose in many ways "vegetates" on the repertory of existing stories or on the primeval "myth", revealing itself, as it were, as a "palimpsest" or as the "book of arabesques".¹³ In both cases the text appears to be the result of a particular graphic activity: either it conceals a number of underlying texts of which certain traces can still be discerned, or it behaves as mere commentary or ornamentation in the margin of the actual yet invisible text. Whatever the case may be, the text always manifests itself as a mere "text", that is, as a horizontal configuration of signs which does not pretend to carry within itself a particular semantic core or essence, which is explicitly situated outside (or rather, next to) itself. The palimpsest, on the one hand, conceals a more important text (the Original) of which it is merely a "superscription" or yet another superscription of a single Original. In the case of the arabesque, on the other hand, the text suggests a particular mythic core around which it incessantly circles but which itself is unattainable. The text, which explicitly is a "text" (the result of a graphic activity), urges the reader to the active exegesis of its deeper meaning, though it already carries the unavoidable fiasco of this exegetic act within itself; the actual, (more) authentic text is always elsewhere. As the exegetic act must be repeated over and over again, it is itself foregrounded, as it were, as a process.

A similar situation appears in *Patuba*. Due to its multilayered structure and heterogeneous composition, critics have always questioned the textual and generic status of the novel. More particularly, they had the impression that the actual work (the artistic core) had been overshadowed by the abundant commentary. Immediately after its publication, for instance, Władysław Jabłonowski called *Patuba* "an unusual commentary, a great and masterly scaffold for a work which is almost invisible apart from this" ("niepospolity komentarz, wielkie i misterne rusztowanie do dzieła, którego po za nim prawie nie widać"; 1903: 407-408). What such critical commentaries suggest is that Irzykowski was mainly interested in contextualizing the actual novel or adding ever new points of view on its rather lame story. In the terminology of this section, one could posit that these critics received the novel as "arabesques" of commentary in the margins of an absent "masterpiece".

Furthermore, such early critics as Kazimierz Wyka also mentioned the palimpsestic structure of the novel, stressing, for example, that it was "a true interlacement of a couple of novels being written simultaneously, without, however, containing one single novel that was fully completed" ("istna plecionka kilku powieści naraz pisanych, ale nie zawiera ani jednej powieści naprawdę dopełnionej"; Wyka 1977 [1948]: 184). The interpretation of *Patuba* as some kind of palimpsest that had been written over the actual "text" or "novel" in various layers or versions could easily be legitimized by referring to the following metapoetical utterance in the novel:

Tzw. dzieło sztuki, o ile robione jest pod naporem wewnętrznej potrzeby, a nie z myślą "obdarzenia ojczystej literatury nowym arcydziełem", o tyle jest tylko śladem, echem przełomów w duszy "twórcy". Ślad może być niezupełny, nie dopowiedziany, bo to, co jest dla autora najważniejsze, najciekawsze, rozegrało się poza utworem. (P 559)

(As far as the so-called work of art is made under the pressure of an inner need, and not with the intention of "offering a new masterpiece to national literature", it is merely a trace, an echo of the changes in the soul of the "creator". The trace can be incomplete, unfinished, for that which is the most important and interesting for the author is what happened outside the work.)

In other words, beside or under the realized text there is always an eternally absent "text" that is completely consistent with the inner feelings of the author.

As Szary-Matywiecka has demonstrated, the dynamics of rewriting and overwriting in *Patuba* is more complex than can be concluded from the text's discursive layer. According to her, the novel is characterized by a "different functional application of fiction" ("inne funkcjonalne zużytkowanie fikcji"; 1979: 23), because the text is not, as is usually the case, producing a story, but it is the other way round: the story is a "prefabrication" that generates a series of textual variants. As a result, the story's semantic core is always absent, whereas the texts that keep emerging are merely attempts at

¹³ At the center of the discussion of this particular characteristic of Schulz's prose is, of course, the story triptych 'Księga' ('The Book'), 'Genialna epoka' ('The Age of Genius'), and 'Spring'. Cf. Lachmann (1992) for the concept of the "book of arabesques" ("So wie das Sinnzentrum, das das Urbuch zu verheißen scheint, im Aufschub bleibt, befinden sich die Bildphantasmen, in denen die Suche nach dem Buch inszeniert wird, in einem Sinnschwebezustand. Da sie in wuchernder, metamorphotischer Bewegung nicht auf einen Sinnkern orientiert sind, stürzen sie zentrifugal auseinander. Aber in dieser metamorphotischen, zentrifugalen Bewegung, die ihre punktuelle Identität ständig aufkündigt, schreiben sie selbst ein Buch, das Buch der Arabesken"; 454).

reading its unattainable essence. What this continual exegesis of the story through an accumulation of provisional readings (“texts”) eventually demonstrates is that every concretization of a text (every “reading”), including that of the actual reader, is dubious and provisional. In other words, by textually dramatizing the reader’s unstable position, Irzykowski’s novel effectuates a *foregrounding* of the specific role of the reader in any form of literary communication.

Whereas Szary-Matywiecka mainly focuses on the “possible” (both realized and merely suggested) textual incarnations of the story of Strumieński’s platonic love for Angelika,¹⁴ I (as a reader of the only existing text of the novel) would like to draw attention to the more subtle signals by which the text either directly or indirectly discloses its deficient, provisional, or palimpsestic character. On many occasions, for instance, the narrating author, who pretends to be in the middle of writing a novel with the same title, suggests that the present version is but one possibility in a long chain of textual representations of his novelistic concept: *Patuba* already not only has a prehistory (cf. the account of an evening gathering at which the “author” reads an earlier version of his novel to “a circle of invited literators”/“grono zaproszonych literatów”; P573), but also anticipates such future versions as “a popular edition” (“popularne wydanie”; P362), “a school edition” (“szkolne wydanie”; P 419, P 533), and even “the ideal *Patuba*, the one that should have been written” (“idealna *Patuba*, taka, jaką się powinno było napisać”; P 569).

The question of the possibility of a definitive version of the novel and its relation to the text at hand is further complicated by the addition of the novella ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’. Again, notwithstanding the presence of the unifying discursive layer (and, more specifically, the explanatory essay ‘An Explanation of *The Dreams of Maria Dunin* and Its Connection with *Patuba*’), the position of the novella in the complete textual reality is far from stable. First of all, in chapter XII of the actual novel the novella ironically enters the fictional reality of Strumieński and Ola. Being some kind of allegorical mirror text of Strumieński’s story (cf. supra), it immediately starts to influence both him and Ola. The latter, for instance, plans to “write a new ‘Maria Dunin’” (“[napisać] nową ‘Marię Dunin’”) and even calls Strumieński in passing “the male Maria Dunin” (“męska Maria Dunin”; P 237). For his part, Strumieński, who is used to devising all kinds of “symmetries” or “constructions” in any given situation, immediately discovers certain parallels between Maria Dunin and himself. His “reading” of the novella is, however, far from unequivocal, and his attitude toward its author similarly hesitates between praise and attempts to “denigrate” him “as a romantic, a decadent, a neurasthenic who worships an erotomaniac, and suchlike” (“poniżyć [...] jako romantyka, dekadenta, neurastenika, który uświetnia erotomanę itp.”; P 238). What this example once more illustrates is that as soon as a text serves as a function of the unstable position of the reader, it may “incarnate” in ever new versions.

The presence of the novella and its author in the fictional framework of the actual novel also causes a fundamental ontological distortion. Not only does it unsettle the conventional closedness of the novelistic text (as the novella is both part of and prior to *Patuba*), but it also puts into question the author’s authority (as the novella’s author is both said to have passed away and identified with the narrating “author”). Few critics have noted that the novella itself in a similar way distorts the convention of the text as a closed structure and of the narrating “author” as a reliable mediator of the story. The opening lines already hint at this in many ways:

Wskutek ożywionej i serdecznej pogadanki, którą aż do późnej nocy toczyliśmy w salonie państwa X-ów, oproszono mnie, abym w mojej formie, formie szkicu z podróży, opisał pewien wypadek z swego życia, mający związek ze sferami idealnymi, mistycznymi. [...] Rzeczywiście mam coś takiego w bibliotece swoich wspomnień [...] (P 7)

(On the occasion of an animated and warm conversation I had well into the night in the salon of Mr and Ms X, I was asked to describe in my form, in the form of a travel account, one of my personal adventures having a connection with the ideal, mystical spheres. I indeed carry something like that in the library of my memories.)

Although this passage suggests a classical story within a story, expressions such as “travel account” and “library of my memories” indicate that the narrative situation might be more stylized than expected. When the narrator occasionally interrupts his account in the following chapters, the initial

¹⁴ As the critic demonstrates, both Strumieński (in the biography *Księga miłości/The Book of Love*) and his rival Gasztold (in the novel *Chora miłość/A Sick Love*) at a certain point seek to evade the “palubic element” by producing real (semi-)autobiographic texts in which they can easily construct their high ideals of love.

situation even appears to have disappeared. In the beginning of chapter IV “a certain guy to whom I [the narrator] have read the hitherto collected memories” (“[p]ewien jegomość, któremu przeczytałem dotąd spisane wspomnienia”; P 29) is mentioned. A bit further this same “clever guy who has read the beginning of these sheets” (“bystry jegomość, który czytał początek tych luźnych kartek”; P 34) reappears. Both examples stress the textual character of what is narrated, thus problematizing the initial narrative situation. This situation is similar to what happens in the actual novel: the story’s essence is “read” in various ways and turned into provisional “texts”. As a result, the reader’s attention is temporarily distracted from the content of the story to the form in which it is passed on. At the same time, the narrator appears to be unreliable and loses his “authorial” status.

The novella ends with a true *coup de théâtre* when it appears that all that preceded was but a mystification. It turns out that the narrator (the archaeologist who pretended to have discovered the secret Brotherhood) has become a royal librarian who likes to produce “artificial palimpsests” (“sztuczne palimpsesty”), which he renders more authentic by inserting them into rumpled originals. His surprising conclusion is that “of all these palimpsests this one is the most sophisticated, since I am one of the most excellent members of the Brotherhood of the Great Bell myself!” (“z owych palimpsestów ten właśnie celuje wyrafinowaniem, bo ja sam jestem najznakomitszym z Bractwa Wielkiego Dzwonu!”; P 51). This is why the novella carries the subtitle ‘A Palimpsest’; the supposedly authentic story of Maria Dunin is an ingenious construction whose artificiality is disclosed at the end. In ‘An Explanation’, the “author” explains the subtitle as follows:

‘Maria Dunin’ jest palimpsestem, to znaczy tyle co mistyfikacją. [...] Autor wypowiada oficjalnie przekonania, pod którymi należy dopatrywać się innych jego przekonań, wręcz przeciwnych tamtym. Ponieważ zaś przy końcu autor nawet i te drugie przekonania ujmuje w cudzysłów, przeto można powiedzieć, że ‘Maria Dunin’ jest palimpsestem do kwadratu. (P 560)

(‘Maria Dunin’ is a palimpsest, or in other words, a mystification. The author officially expresses his beliefs, under which one ought to detect his other beliefs, which are diametrically opposed to the former. Given that at the end of the novella even these other beliefs are put in quotation marks by the author, one could state that ‘Maria Dunin’ is a palimpsest to the second power.)

It should be clear that the complex structure of ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’ is treated here as a palimpsest only in a symbolic or allegorical way; indeed, having betrayed himself on several occasions in the course of the story (e.g. when reading part of the manuscript or when adding fake “spiritological” texts to existing documents in order to manipulate Maria), the narrator eventually relativizes the entire “text” by presenting it as a mystification.

According to Aleksandra Budrecka, the importance of the novella’s last sentence cannot be underestimated. When read as a logical paradox of the Epimenides type (“All Cretans are liars”), it simply suggests that in language “nothing can be stated either on the actual or on the represented reality” (“niczego nie da się orzec o rzeczywistości, tak realnej jak i przedstawionej”; 1981: XV) because every statement on the truth inevitably calls forth its antithesis (the lie). When the closing sentence is separated from the rest of the novella, however, then it may reveal itself as the only truthful statement, of which the “linguistic reality” (“rzeczywistość językowa”; XIX) is brought to the surface. As a result, attention is diverted from the “false” world of the archaeologist and Maria Dunin to the “real” world of the narrator, “someone who utters sentences and who establishes their falseness” (“ktoś, kto wypowiada zdania i kto konstatuje ich fałszywość”; XIX). According to Budrecka, the function of this sentence is identical to the many comments in the actual novel; in both cases the inauthentic or linguistic nature of what is narrated is reflexively brought to the surface.

What both Budrecka and the narrator in ‘An Explanation’ seem to overlook is that the creative use of the principle of the palimpsest also results in a *foregrounding* of the textual character of *Patuba*. The act of “overwriting” other texts confronts the reader with the finiteness of the visible text as opposed to the infinity of all possible texts. As soon as the reader is aware of the (partial) absence of a text that is potentially richer than the text that is before him, the latter may transform before his eyes into an insufficient ornament (an “arabesque”) that merely represents the absence of a more “original” text that has become unattainable. The idea that a text may hide more than it actually discloses is thematized in ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’ through the appearance of a mysterious manuscript. Although its content plays an essential role in the further development of the story, the narrator signals

that it lacks “a lot of pages, probably the most important ones, as well as the complete conclusion” (“brak było wielu kartek, prawdopodobnie najważniejszych, oraz całego końca”; P 28). The motive of an incomplete document that nevertheless is considered to be highly significant also appears in Schulz’s story ‘The Age of Genius’ in the form of the famous *szpargal* or “script”.

The resultant readerly tendency to fill in a text’s “blank spaces” (that is, the textual options that could have been rendered but were erased from the textual surface as in a palimpsest) has also been dramatized in *Paluba* in a particular way. Indeed, both in the novella and, to a lesser extent, in the actual novel certain textual elements are explicitly suppressed, as a result of which the reader is invited to actively bridge the gaps. This strategy ranges from simple omissions – cf. references to “Mr and Ms X” (cf. supra) or to the “vicinity of N... Q.” (“okolice N... Q.”; P 9) – to a more general narratorial attitude of openly concealing certain (often embarrassing) details. This strategy is also present in Schulz’s stories (e.g. in Joseph’s descriptions of his father’s behavior in ‘Traktat o manekinach’/‘Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies’), and it seems to have its prehistory in ‘The Dreams of Maria Dunin’, in which the narrator, for instance, quotes a letter he received from the Brotherhood “leaving out the words that could be misunderstood (“z opuszczeniem słów, które by można fałszywie zrozumieć”; P 32). Quite ironically, what is left after this act of censorship is completely incomprehensible.

Since many of the novella’s lacunae are filled in ‘An Explanation’ (where, for example, the full text of the letter from the Brotherhood is rendered), critics have never questioned this narrative technique. Because the inaccuracies in the account of the novella’s narrator are adjusted by the narrating “author” through whom the rest of the novel is mediated, the latter is considered to be fully reliable. When taking a closer look at this narrator’s account, however, one may discover similar reservations toward what is told. The narrator not only constantly puts his own language between quotation marks or suggests that he might have rendered certain passages in a more poetic way, but also is responsible for the kind of omissions for which he blames the novella’s narrator. In a passage that strikingly resembles the novella’s narration, Strumieński discovers a farewell letter on Angelika’s chest after her suicidal fall in a well: “Part of it was illegible, since the ink had dissolved in the water, but the part that he could decipher – it ended with the question: “All right?” – deeply touched him” (“Część jego była nieczytelna, bo atrament rozpuścił się w wodzie, lecz to, co odczytał, zakończone pytaniem: ‘czy dobrze?’, przejęło go do głębi”; P 93). Once again, the reader is confronted with the existence of an important text of which the narrator knows the full content, the protagonist merely the outlines, and the reader nothing but an unimportant detail. In ‘The Rampart of *Paluba*’ the idea of the complete novel as a text that is deliberately left incomplete for the reader (in other words, as a “palimpsest” that is merely an “echo” or “trace” of an unattainable essence) is commented on as follows:

Ja [...] nie troszczę się o miny, wygody i kaprysy czytającego, nie gram na “strunach jego duszy”, lecz urządzam mu wykłady o *Palubie*, tej, która gdzieś tam napisana całkiem inaczej spoczywa w mojej głowie, a wykładam mu jak profesor, który część prelekcji mówi głośno i przystępnie, a druga część, o której wątpi, czy ją kto zrozumie, mówi obrócony do ściany, czasem mruczając pod nosem. (P 579)

(I don’t care about the grimaces, the conveniences, and the whims of the reader; I don’t “pluck his heart’s strings”, but I’m giving him lectures on *Paluba*, on the version that rests somewhere in my head in a completely different form, and I teach him just like a professor who reads part of his lecture aloud and clearly; the other part, however, of which he doubts that someone will understand it, he utters with his face turned to the wall, just muttering something every now and then.)

As the reader is confronted with a text that openly omits essential information, he might feel tempted to look for certain hidden connections himself. This inevitable reaction will manifest itself particularly when reading those parts in which the cryptographic character of the novel is revealed. As soon as the text manifests itself as a cryptogram, it explicitly becomes a “text” to be deciphered by a reader in order to lay bare the connections underlying the visible “signs”. In many cases, this typically readerly attitude is further influenced by the behavior of the protagonists, who constantly tend to look for hidden meanings themselves. The first target of both readers and protagonists seems to be the choice of proper names. In what is perhaps the most striking example of this characteristic, Piotr (Piotruś) Strumieński (born Włosek) draws a parallel between his surname and the “stream” (*strumień*) in which his future lover Berestajka has just dropped a ring by accident; his conclusion is

that Berestajka is now symbolically engaged with him. On the one hand, this association seems to be a quite ironical attempt by Strumieński to (once more) take advantage of certain symmetries between the signs that surround him – ironical, as he got his surname only after having been adopted by a nobleman named Adam Strumieński. On the other hand, however, the parallel between the surname and the concept of a “stream” *could* be interpreted as more than just a coincidence, as Strumieński’s impulse to organize reality by means of all kinds of “constructions” *does* indeed seem to be an attempt at escaping the (“palubic”) “stream” of life. A similar manipulation of proper names can also be found a bit earlier in the novel, where Strumieński names his son Paweł/Pawełek (Paul) “after the name of the apostle who did not like women” (“od imienia apostoła, który nie lubił kobiet”; P 180). What is suggested here is that Strumieński once more tries to impose a certain scheme on reality; more specifically, by establishing a connection with the apostle, he hopes that Pawełek will stay away from his mother Ola, who in Strumieński’s model represents physical (as opposed to platonic) love. Moreover, in a way that reminds of the situation in Schulz’s stories (in which the narrator and his father are named Joseph and Jacob respectively), Strumieński also seems to want to connect his son’s fate with his own ambitions (Piotr-Paweł, or Peter-Paul). As we will later see, all these aspirations will eventually prove a failure.

It should be clear that this focus on the practice of manipulating and wrongly interpreting names is part of a more general strategy in the novel of mocking the typically human tendency to impose all kinds of “constructions” (words, names, forms, concepts, symbols) on the world. The narrator seems to be particularly aiming at those moments in which such “errors in reasoning” (“błędy myślowe”; P 519 and *passim*) result in a complete fiasco. Most of these “errors” go back to the idyllic “ideal” love between Strumieński and Angelika, who are reported to be completely obsessed with “the conviction that love is a problem, a *cryptogram* of the world that has to be solved” (“przekonanie, że miłość jest problemem, *kryptogramem* świata, który należy rozwiązać”; P 80; *italics mine*). As we have seen, in his pursuit of the ideal of posthumous love, Strumieński is permanently thwarted by the chaos of life. Until now, critics of *Paluba* have mainly discussed this clash between the ideal and reality as a psychological problem, much in the same way as it is commented on in the novel’s discursive layer, that is, by means of the dialectics between the “constructive element” and the “*palubic* element” (cf. *supra*). However, what has too often been overlooked is that Irzykowski’s protagonists, as they experience the world explicitly as a “text” (a cryptogram, a selection of signs), confront the reader with the inevitable fiasco of his own reading.

As a matter of fact, the text abounds in examples of (mis)readings, thus stressing the problematic nature of any exegetic practice. First of all, both the narrator (in his many comments) and the protagonists (e.g. when a copy of the novella falls into their hands) often use literary models in order to “model” their thoughts and behavior. In the novella, then, one of the crucial “texts” to be read by both the protagonists and the reader is the mysterious configuration of three small islands in a local pond, each of which stands for a letter (B, W, and D). This acronym – a “mysterious monogram” (“tajemniczy monogram”; P 14) in the narrator’s words – of course refers to the Brotherhood’s full name (Bractwo Wielkiego Dzwonu). Both the archaeologist (when visiting the islands) and the reader (when confronted with a schematic presentation of the three islands), however, are invited to find out the truth of this cryptogram themselves, of “reading” its hidden meaning. In the course of the story, the archaeologist reveals himself as a detective-like figure who attempts to make every insinuation, every detail, and every noise fit into the scheme of his exegesis.

In the actual novel the situation is more comparable than is generally assumed. First of all, by adding a map depicting the scene of the action and commenting on it on the opening pages of the novel, Irzykowski seems to want to stress the two-dimensionality of the story world, which is presented as a closed configuration of lines, dots, and letters (A, B, C, D... for indicating the main places) rather than as an illusion of a three-dimensional, “real” reality. Not surprisingly, during his frequent “attempts to get to the core” (cf. *supra*), Piotr Strumieński approaches this reality primarily as a “text” of which the essence may be revealed through intensive exegesis. Immediately after Angelika’s suicide, for instance, Strumieński starts exploring the estate’s vicinity in search of “signs” that could help him to unravel the mystery of Angelika’s death:

Nieraz [...], kiedy się [...] intensywnie wpatrywał w kontury, kształty i barwy naokoło siebie, [...] wówczas zakulisowym ruchem fantazji wywoływał w sobie wrażenie, że kształty te i barwy poruszają się na swych

krawędziach, jakby maszerować chciały, zmieniają się, przepływają w siebie, że cały świat chwieje się, drży i mruga na niego tajemniczo, jakby mu dawał znaki, jakby w nim było coś zakłętego, co się chce zdradzić, że nie jest takim, jakim się być wydaje. (P 99-100)

(Sometimes, when he looked intensively at the contours, the shapes, and the colors around him, he then furtively activated his fantasy in order to evoke the impression in himself that these shapes and colors were set in motion at their edges, as if they wanted to march, to change, to merge into each other, that the entire world was staggering, trembling and secretly winking at him, as if it was giving him signs, as if a curse rested on him that wanted to reveal itself, in brief, that the world was different than it seemed.)

This “trembling” and “winking” of nature reminds us, of course, of the way in which Schulz’s narrator experiences reality. One of the most striking examples of this may be found in the opening pages of ‘Spring’, in which this most inspiring season is represented as a whirl of signs, as a loose configuration of signifiers still to be “read” by the narrator.¹⁵ In a similar way, Strumieński imposes his “constructions” on the open “text” of reality – to such an extent even that he experiences these constructions “as if he was reading a book” (“jakby książkę czytał”; P 385).

Another striking characteristic is that Strumieński’s “attempts to get to the core”, which are, after all, attempts to grasp nature in cultural schemes, at a certain point start to manifest themselves in the form of artistic activities. In a similar way as Jacob in Schulz’s story ‘Birds’ wants to maintain his ideals of poetry by setting up a colorful colony of birds in the attic of his house, Strumieński attempts to “construct” an ideal picture of his matrimonial life with Angelika by means of a series of creative experiments. He not only sets up a cult of Angelika in the museum which he has created to her memory, but also, in the course of time, tries to initiate his son Pawełek into this cult through the most diverse creative activities. One of these activities consists of writing Angelika’s artistic biography (*The Book of Love*) – an undertaking which ends in a complete fiasco. Just like his ideal of platonic love is permanently thwarted by the sensual aspect of love (cf. supra), Strumieński now cannot but conclude that he must constantly suppress all kinds of (mainly sexual) details when writing down the “ideal” history of Angelika. In the concluding chapter the deforming effect of the *palubic* element on his creativity is expressed as follows: “What else was this entire history of Angelika than arabesques around the most ordinary obscenities” (“Czymże była cała historia Angeliki, jeżeli nie arabeskami naokoło całkiem prostych świństw?”; P 474).

After having broken off his biographical project and having devoted himself to the study of the “sexless relations of plants” (“bezpłciowe stosunki roślin”; P 285), Strumieński’s impulse to “express himself in some work of art” (“wypowiedzenie się w jakimś dziele sztuki”; P 290) soon resurfaces. After a double and once more disappointing architectural enterprise, however, Strumieński starts to concentrate his artistic ambitions on living material, that is, on his son Pawełek. As the boy functions as some kind of incarnation of Angelika, Strumieński expects him to be predestined to be a painter (just like Angelika) and therefore is tempted to “sow artistic impressions in him” (“zasiewanie w nim wrażeń artystycznych”; P 299). In the conviction that “nature is abundant in allusions” (“[n]atura jest obfita w aluzje”; P 302), he takes Pawełek to a forest and confronts him with the reflection of the palace that he has ordered to be built:

[W] wodzie widzieli [...] drugi daleko piękniejszy pałac, [...] zbudowany [...] przez tajemnicze duchy podziemne, na przekór budowłom nadziemnym tuż pod nimi właśnie, przez duchy, które swoją czynność kryją zazdrośnie przed okiem ludzkim za pomocą złudzenia, iż to jest tylko zwykły fenomen optyczny. (P 302-303)

(In the water they saw another, far more beautiful palace, which had been built by mysterious ghosts of the underground in spite of the aboveground buildings right below by ghosts that kept their activity hidden from sight by means of the illusion that it was merely an ordinary optical phenomenon.)

Having roused Pawełek’s interest in this kind of mystification, Strumieński can now proceed to his main objective: projecting the ideal image of Angelika onto her “spiritual son”. To this end, he sets up a sophisticated construction in the museum in which Angelika’s paintings are exhibited. Each time Pawełek secretly enters the building, he sees a three-dimensional image of a woman through an optical illusion. Instead of making Pawełek partake in the cult of Angelika, however, a “completely unexpected, nearly grotesque turn” (“całkiem niespodziewany, groteskowy niemal obrót”; P 427)

¹⁵ Cf. De Bruyn (2008a) for an analysis of Schulz’s narrator as a “reader” of the “text” of reality.

takes place: after his father has closed down the museum, Pawełek, who has gradually and completely arbitrarily started to refer to the phantom with the name Pałuba (cf. P 317, 458-459), associates the anonymous effigy which he adores (*his* ideal woman) with the loose village idiot Kseńka (whom the shepherds nickname Pałuba). As soon as the licentious Kseńka has initiated him into the physical (instead of the platonic or cultural) aspects of love, the image of Angelika is transformed, as it were, into its dialectical negation.

This “grotesque turn” appears to have a lot in common with a similar event in *Cinnamon Shops*. As has already been mentioned, one of Jacob’s most remarkable “attempts to get to the core” is the establishment of a colony of birds in the attic of his house. At the peak of the experiment, however, the by then extensive collection of all kinds of breeds is chased away by Adela. When the birds eventually return to their spiritual father in the final story of the cycle (‘Noc wielkiego sezonu’/‘The Night of the Great Season’), they appear to have developed into an “brood of freaks” (“sztuczne potomstwo”) that is “degenerated and overgrown” (“zwyrodniałe i wybujale”), a “malformed, wasted tribe of birds” (CF 93; “zdegenerowane plemię ptasie, zmarniałe wewnątrznie”; SC 157). After the birds have been knocked down with stones thrown by a bunch of jesters Jacob cannot but “notice the wretchedness of that wasted generation, the nonsense of its second-rate anatomy” (CF 94; “obserwować całą lichotę tej zubożalej generacji, całą śmieszność jej *tandetnej* anatomii”; SC 158; italics mine). In spite of its high aspirations, the experiment turns out to have yielded nothing but *tandeta* (“trash”), that is, defective copies of the birds that he had intended to create:

Były to ogromne wiechcie piór, wypchane byle jak starym ścierwem. U wielu nie można było wyróżnić głowy, gdyż pałkowata ta część ciała nie nosiła żadnych znamion duszy. Niektóre pokryte były kudłatą, zlepioną sierścią, jak żubry, i śmierdziały wstrętnie. Inne przypominały garbate, łyse, zdechłe wielbłądy. Inne wreszcie były najwidoczniej z pewnego rodzaju papieru, puste w środku, a świetnie kolorowe na zewnątrz. Niektóre okazywały się z bliska niczym innym jak wielkimi pawimi ogonami, kolorowymi wachlarzami, w które niepojętym sposobem tchnięto jakiś pozór życia. (SC 158)

(They had been nothing but enormous bunches of feathers, stuffed carelessly with old carrion. In many of them, one could not recognise where the heads had been, for that misshapen part of their bodies was unmarked by the presence of a soul. Some were covered with a curly matted fur, like bison, and stank horribly. Others reminded one of hunchbacked, bald, dead camels. Others still must have been made of a kind of cardboard, empty inside but splendidly coloured on the outside. Some of them proved at close quarters to be nothing more than large peacock’s tails, colourful fans, into which by some obscure process a semblance of life had been breathed; CF 94)

The analogy with *Pałuba* could be expressed as follows: just like Strumieński sets up a complex construction in order to “mould” Pawełek into something that he is not in reality, Jacob attempts to impose his will on matter and bring it to life. Both “creative” projects, however, take revenge on their creators: Pawełek shatters the ideal his father was aiming at and shows his human instincts, while Jacob’s birds shake off the illusion and disclose their “trashy” nature. The ambition “to get to the core” that Strumieński and Jacob share collides in a grotesque way with reality, with *pałuba* and *tandeta*; the illusory symmetry between the idea and its representation has to give way to the asymmetry of the final result. Moreover, the fiasco of both protagonists’ experiments had already been hinted at beforehand: Jacob’s birds might have been merely the result of his reading of “large ornithological textbooks” (“wielkie ornitologiczne compendia”) from whose pages “these feathery phantasms seemed to rise” (Cf 21; “zdawały się ulatywać [...] te pierzaste fantazmaty”; SC 69), while Strumieński already knew from his personal experiences that man will always be thwarted in his higher aspirations by the physical aspects of love.

Although both grotesque turns in some way result in a defeat, both protagonists stubbornly continue their illusory activities. In Jacob’s case, this continuation is mainly the effect of the cyclic nature of Schulz’s literary reality. As has been sufficiently demonstrated by many critics, Schulz’s stories are characterized by a circular rather than a chronological temporal structure, as a result of which each motive may be perpetually repeated. A striking example of this is exactly Jacob’s constant struggle with the grayness and stability of everyday reality, which is perhaps best revealed in his repeated yet each time provisional metamorphoses.

Strumieński, for his part, does not seem to calm down either in the wake of the clash between his “construction” and the “*palubic* element”; after he has shot Kseńka (who had come to visit Pawełek at his sickbed), he is convinced he has averted the sensual branch of the myth of Angelika. At

once the “Angelika case” starts with a new cycle: “Strumieński experienced a moment in life at which he, after having passed through a particular cycle, had reached the same point for the second time” (“[Strumieński miał] chwilę w życiu, w której niejako po przebyciu pewnego koła drugi raz był w tym samym punkcie”; P 481). After Pawełek’s death in particular, he cannot restrain himself from linking all he experiences in life to one single scheme: “Seduced by the extraordinary, though in fact only superficial, symmetry of the events, he connected their peaks with lines, created a historiosophy of his own life, searched for pseudoconnections in it and dranked in these” (“Uwiedziony nadzwyczajną, chociaż pozorną tylko symetrycznością zdarzeń, łączył ich punkty szczytowe liniami, tworzył historiozofię własnego życia, doszukiwał się w nim pseudozwiązków, którymi się upajał”; P 489). On the very last page of the novel, Strumieński’s “mythologizing of reality” finally seems to have reached its apogee: “The Angelika case entered the stadium of the highest, already unattainable spiritualization” (“Sprawa Angelika wstąpiła w stadium najwyższego, nienaruszalnego już uduchowienia”; P 490). The spiral in which Strumieński seems to be caught, however, cannot even be broken by his own death, as he will then enter “into that land, where he will eventually find out how things really are at the other side of the canvas” (“w ten kraj, gdzie wreszcie zobaczy, jak to tam jest po drugiej stronie kanwy”; P 490). It should be clear that the choice of the symbolically charged *kanwa* (“canvas”) as the last word of the novel once more strengthens the hypothesis of the horizontal orientation of Strumieński’s reality.

Strumieński’s tragedy is in fact identical to what happens to Joseph in such stories as ‘Spring’ (cf. supra). Both protagonists attempt to impose a particular scenario on their realities, even though they are (to a different extent) aware of the inevitable fiasco. Their tragedy is first and foremost the result of the “exegetic paradox”: reality is perceived as a “text” from which a certain meaning should be drawn, which nonetheless slips through their fingers again and again. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what eventually affects the actual reader of their texts. In *Pałuba* the reader is even made aware of his inclination to chase blindly after some ultimate *signifié* by devising illusory symmetries between the signs of a given text: “I know that my sober protest against Strumieński’s behavior will be some kind of humiliation for three-fourths of my readers, who, while being equally influenced by the suggestion of the facts, might feel exactly the same as Strumieński” (“Wiem, że ten mój trzeźwy protest przeciw zachowaniu się Strumieńskiego będzie rodzajem upokorzenia dla trzech czwartych moich czytelników, którzy, ulegając również sugestii faktów, ewentualnie tak samo by czuli jak Strumieński”; P 477). In other words, *Pałuba* does everything to thwart a traditional reading toward some kind of closure. Although it is possible to distinguish particular connections as the act of reading proceeds, these eventually turn out to be “pseudoconnections” that are as deceitful as provisional.

What we can learn from Irzykowski and Schulz is that the asymmetric, three-dimensional, and infinite reality cannot be grasped in an inevitably symmetric, two-dimensional, and finite text. In their respective works this conflict is dramatized by laying bare the horizontal, textual character of the literary reality in question, after which the characters are exposed to the tragedy of the circular, recursive exegesis of their own textual reality. Eventually, the narrating “author” himself has to admit that his own “text” is but a “trace” of an unattainable original:

Po analizie przedmiotu przychodzi kolej na mikroskop. Spełnić to, co w świecie fizycznym równałoby się widzeniu własnych oczu. Sprawa Strumieńskiego tkwi we mnie samym [...] Miałbym więc pisać swoją własną *Pałubę*? Zdaje mi się, że zapomniałem na chwilę, w jakim się towarzystwie znajduję. Czy mam sam jeden – w literaturze – grać w otwarte karty? tam gdzie się gra nawet fałszywymi? (P 450-451)

(Now the object has been analyzed, let us focus on the microscope. Let us fulfill what in the physical world would be equal to looking at one’s own eyes. The Strumieński case is inside myself. Do I have to write my own *Pałuba* then? Apparently I have forgotten for a moment in which company I am. Do I have to be the only person – in literature – who shows his cards? While others even play with false ones?)

What this passage suggests is that it is impossible to fully “show one’s cards”: when “looking at our own eyes” in a mirror, all we can see is but a representation that confronts us with the limits of our own visual range. The illusion that reality can be fully grasped dashes against the surface of the mirror; the own eye is a “residue” whose ultimate *signifié* will remain concealed forever. Even the metafictional text, which looks at itself as in a mirror, cannot possibly pass this limit; just like any other text, it will always remain an inauthentic construction – *pałuba* or *tandeta*.

Pałuba, Manekin, Tandeta. Apology of the Inauthentic Art

As has been suggested earlier, the constructive dimension of both Irzykowski's and Schulz's destructive literary practices cannot be denied. After the illusion of an attainable semantic core has been shattered, the reader is offered the perspective of an active, recursive, and reflexive reading of the respective texts' "transformativity" ("transformacyjność"; cf. Szary-Matywiecka 1979: 36). More specifically, the reader may feel challenged by the text to a complex "game", an alternative series of rules (conventions) and signs (words), in which one has to play a particular "role" that may offer a certain "pleasure". Indeed, between the reader and his illusion of a three-dimensional reality a two-dimensional text is placed, like a chessboard on which the reader may freely arrange all kinds of temporary constructions. The reader becomes a "player" who is well aware of his exceptional role.

What the reader may learn from all this is that this "game" is the only kind of authenticity that literature has to offer. In 'Author's Trio' this positive value of the "role" and the "comedy" each human being inevitably has to play in life is underscored as follows:

Mamże wyraźnie powiedzieć, że jestem po stronie Strumieńskiego? Gdyby taki człowiek żył [...], rad bym się z nim spotkał i pomówił. Powiedziałbym mu może: Panie Strumieński, ty, który chciałeś urzeczywistnić frazes, w jakiż to wpadłeś chaos! Dlaczego ci nie przyszło na myśl, że nie ty skompromitowałeś ideę, ale że idea skompromitowała się przed tobą! [...] Widziałem np., jak odkrywając w sobie pewną warstwę komedii, użytkowałeś to odkrycie i wycofałeś się. Mamże ci brać to za złe? Potknąłeś się tylko na własnej szczerości. Bo cóż to znaczy komedia? Pokazuje się, że jest ona niezbędną częścią działania ludzkiego; a jeżeli człowiek wybiera sobie wyższe formy życia, ma jakieś wzory lub plany przed oczyma, wówczas musi mu towarzyszyć *uczucie roli*. [...] W ogóle zanadto się ulega rozróżnianiu dwóch kontrastów: pozoru i istoty rzeczy, a tylko Goethe miał pomysł powiedzieć: "So, laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde." (P 428-430)

(Do I have to state explicitly that I sympathize with Strumieński? If such a person would exist, I would be happy to meet him and talk to him. I would probably tell him: Mr. Strumieński, you who wanted to execute a cliché, in which chaos have you ended up! Why haven't you realized that it was not you who has compromised the idea, but the idea which has compromised itself in front of you! I have noticed, for instance, how you, after you had discovered a certain layer of comedy in yourself, took advantage of this discovery and then withdrew. Should I hold this against you? You have only stumbled over your own sincerity. For what does that mean, comedy? Apparently, it is inextricably part of human conduct; so, if someone chooses higher forms of life for himself or has certain models or plans in mind, then he must be accompanied by a *sense of role*. In general, we reconcile ourselves too easily to the distinction between these two opposites – the appearance and the essence of things – and only Goethe came up with the idea to state: "So lasst mich scheinen, bis ich werde".)

In other words, those who take their ideals too seriously and ignore the "sense of role" will inevitably end up in chaos. Only those who are aware of the relativity of every human act, of the comedy that lies at the basis of every human aspiration, may experience a certain degree of authenticity.

A similar stress on the playful dimension of being, on the undermining of seriousness, can be found in Schulz's work. In his essay for Witkacy, the writer describes his literary reality as follows:

Obecna tam jest nieustannie atmosfera kulisy, tylnej strony sceny, gdzie aktorzy po zrzuceniu kostiumów zaśmiewają się z patosu swych ról. W samym fakcie istnienia poszczególnego zawarta jest ironia, nabieranie, język po błazeńsku wystawiony. (682-683)

(Thus an all-pervading aura of irony emanates from this substance. There is an ever-present atmosphere of the stage, of sets viewed from behind, where the actors make fun of the pathos of their parts after stripping out their costumes. The bare fact of separate individual existence holds an irony, a hoax, a clown's stuck-out tongue; 1990: 113)

In other words, both authors explicitly stress that the exposure of the characters' tragedy causes a turn that reveals the positive, playful, and comical side of their tragic roles. The awareness that all seriousness is but a provisional "costume" (a "form") that can be "stripped off" without any problem, reduces their drama to reasonable proportions. Even the cyclical repetition of the drama in ever new forms is not disadvantageous, as the laugh and the "stuck-out tongue" will always function as "safety valves" through which the surplus of seriousness can be temporarily reduced. The last issue to be addressed, then, is in which ways Irzykowski and Schulz have embedded this awareness of the

eventual “superficiality” of each human act (and, as a consequence, also of their own literary practice) into their texts.

It should be clear that characters such as Maria, Strumieński, and Jacob are not so much responsible for their fortunes, as they are victims of a specific (literary) role. Therefore, one should also pay some attention to the reliability of the narrator of their stories. Schulz’s stories are characterized by a type of narration that Alfred Sproede, because of its dialectic of seduction and deception, has appropriately called “a kind of humbug” (“une espèce de boniment”; 2000: 148). Indeed, on numerous occasions, the characters and their reality (the merchandise) as well as the reader (the potential buyer) are explicitly twisted around the finger of the “humbugging” narrator (the seller). Irzykowski’s narrator too is not as balanced as many critics have thought he was.¹⁶ In ‘Author’s Trio’ the narrator even openly confronts himself as “author”:

Bo cóż sądzisz ty sam, szanowny autorze? [...] Czy jesteś jednym z tych autorów, którzy wyszydzą, wydrwiwają swe postacie, aby przez to narzucić czytelnikowi opinię, że oni sami więcej wiedzą, że są mądrzejsi? Czy nie przerzucasz właśnie swego własnego chaosu na Strumieńskiego? (P 428)

(Now what’s your opinion, dear author? Are you one of those writers who make fun of their characters and ridicule them in order to force the reader to believe that they know more themselves, that they are more intelligent? Aren’t you in fact shifting your own chaos onto Strumieński?)

In other words, the narrator is clearly aware of the relativity of his own narrative construction. He even doubts if the use of reflexive devices will offer a way out of this aporia: “Until now, there were certain accents in your story that made me hope that you would lead me behind the coulisses of the coulisses of your art” (“[W] twym opowiadaniu były takie akcenty, które mi się każą spodziewać, że wprowadzisz mnie za kulisy kulis swej sztuki”; P 429). What the narrator suggests here is that even the exposure of his own narrative procedures is no guarantee for a stable, reliable, and “ordered” account, as new coulisses will continue to turn up behind the coulisses that have already been exposed.

The reason why both Schulz’s and Irzykowski’s narrators also eventually undermine their own stability is that they are convinced that any attempt at “ordering” their world or making essentialist statements will inevitably lead them into chaos and that only the “appearance” and the “game” are legitimate. For similar reasons, both authors not only seem to have reconciled themselves in advance to the provisional and defective nature of their literary constructions, but also deliberately stick to an aesthetics for which Pawłowska-Jądrzyk has coined the term “mediocrity” (“bylejakość”) – “a term which is used for denoting the specificity of the poetics of works which stand out with a deliberate carelessness of their artistic execution” (cf. supra). Pawłowska-Jądrzyk pertinently remarks that this aesthetic attitude in both authors’ works has crystallized, as it were, into two “anti-aesthetic” concepts: *tandeta* and *pałuba*. Whereas *tandeta* manifests itself in Schulz’s stories primarily in the form of all kinds of “shoddy” characters and objects, Irzykowski’s concept of *pałuba* seems to be the driving force behind the exposure of all usurping “constructions” of the various protagonists. What Pawłowska-Jądrzyk seems to overlook, however, is that both “symbols” have much more in common than merely their shared emphasis on the “mediocrity” of the literary construction in which they have found themselves.

In a revealing article, Andreas Schönle (1991) has already shed light on the ambiguity and wide range of applications of the concept of *tandeta*. The word and its derivatives as well as the idea of cheap and “shoddy” form are indeed omnipresent in Schulz’s stories: *tandeta* appears as parasitic vegetation (e.g. in ‘Sierpień’ (‘August’) and ‘Pan’), as “shoddy” goods (e.g. in ‘Cinnamon Shops’ and ‘The Street of Crocodiles’), as disabled characters (e.g. in ‘Emeryt’ (‘The Old-Age Pensioner’), ‘Edzio’ (‘Eddie’) and ‘Dodo’), as metamorphoses of humans into lower or marginal forms of life (e.g. not only Jacob’s transformations but also the dog-man in ‘Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass’, the transsexual seller in ‘The Street of Crocodiles’, and uncle Edward as a doorbell in ‘The Comet’), etc. The most “perfect” form in which *tandeta* manifests itself, however, is the *manekin* or “(tailor’s) dummy”. More specifically, due to the incongruity between what is represented (a human being) and the inadequacy of the image, the *manekin* draws some attention on its own material quality of “sign” (cf. Schönle 1991: 132). Quite interestingly, in this same conceptual framework of the poorly

¹⁶ Cf. De Bruyn (2007b, 2008) for more detailed analyses on narrative unreliability in Irzykowski and Schulz.

executed doll, Schulz also employs the rarely used *pałuba* – not only with reference to the less suitable (for apparently more perfect) “figury panopticum” (“figures in the panopticum”) or “pałuby woskowe” (“waxworks”), but also for designating the quality of “shoddy” matter, its “pałubiasta niezgrabność” (“dummy-like clumsiness”). Because Schulz was familiar with *Pałuba* (cf. his mention of it in his review of Gombrowicz’s novel *Ferdydurke*), it is not unlikely that he wanted to insert Irzykowski’s “text” into his own literary reality.

A similarly significant connection between *tandeta* and *pałuba* can be found in the following description of luxuriant vegetation in ‘August’:

Na tych barach ogrodu niechlujna, babska bujność sierpnia wyolbrzymiała w głuche zapadliska ogromnych łożuchów, rozpanoszyła się płatami włochatych blach listnych, wybujałymi ozorami mięsistej zieleni. Tam te wylupiaste *pałuby* łożuchów wybujały się jak babska szeroko rozsiadłe, na wpół pożarte przez własne oszalałe spódnice. Tam sprzedawał ogród za darmo najtańsze krupy dzikiego bzu, śmierdzącą mydłem, grubą kaszę babek, dziką okowitę mięty i wszelką najgorszą *tandetę* sierpniową. (SC 50-51; italics mine)

([On the back of the garden] the untidy, feminine ripeness of August had expanded into enormous, impenetrable, clumps of burdock spreading their sheets of leafy tin, their luxuriant tongues of fleshy greenery. There, those protuberant bur *clumps* spread themselves, like resting peasant women, half enveloped in their own swirling skirts. There, the garden offered free of charge the cheapest fruits of wild lilac, the heady aquavit of mint and all kinds of August *trash*; CF 6; italics mine)

Whereas *tandeta* in this fragment stresses the cheapness and “shoddiness” of the parasitic vegetation in the periphery of the garden, *pałuba* (which in this case rather stands for an “old and ugly woman”, a “hag”; cf. infra) links up with those expressions (e.g. the various variations on *baba*) that designate the impudent femininity and fertility of the plants in question. Apart from this, the word was most probably also chosen for its alliteration (cf. “te wylupiaste pałuby łożuchów wybujały się”), which in a way causes an “overgrowth” of the text’s meaning by its poetic “sound”.

In *Pałuba* the sound of the word plays an important role, too. When *pałuba* is mentioned for the first time on the occasion of the projection of Angelika’s image on one of her paintings, it even seems to represent mere sound without meaning:

Pawełek mówiąc o kobiecie na obrazie nazywał ją czasem [...] “pałubą”, “naszą pałubą”. Dźwięk tego słowa przypominał Strumieńskiemu coś ohydneho i ordynarnego zarazem, co by to jednak było, nie pamiętał. Wprawdzie jeszcze dawniej dowiedział się Strumieński od Pawełka, że on to słowo “pałuba” zasłyszał od parobków i pastuchów wiejskich, w jakim jednak sensie tego słowa używano, Pawełek wytłumaczyć nie umiał. (P 317-318)

(When Pawełek talked about the woman on the painting, he sometimes called her “pałuba”, “our *pałuba*”. The sound of this word reminded Strumieński of something disgusting and ordinary at the same time, but he could not remember what it was. Admittedly, he had already learned from Pawełek that he had heard the word “pałuba” from the servants and the shepherds from the village, but Pawełek had not managed to explain in what sense the word was used.)

Although it is clear that Pawełek had taken over the popular word from the villagers in order to designate in a completely arbitrary way the phantom for which he could not find a name on his own, it now appeals to Strumieński as if it were a cryptogram. As a result, he starts interpreting the word in his own way. In a remarkable scene in Angelika’s museum, Strumieński responds in the following way to Ola’s accusation that he may have killed Angelika himself:

Patrz na ten martwy *manekin* (tu przypomniało mu się słowo Pawełka), na tę pałubę za tym szkłem, ona ust nie otworzy i nic ci nie powie, jeżeli się to nie przeciwie samo na moje usta, jak przeżerający wyrzut sumienia, bo tego nikt nie wie na świecie prócz mnie i tej tu niemej pałuby, która skończyła samobójstwem – ha ha pyszne samobójstwo! (P 374; italics mine)

(Look at this dead dummy (now he remembered Pawełek’s word), at this *pałuba* behind the glass, she will not open her mouth and she will not tell you anything, unless it escapes from my mouth itself, just like devastating remorse, for nobody on earth knows this except for me and this stupid *pałuba*, who has committed suicide – ha ha a marvelous suicide!)

As soon as Strumieński imitates Pawełek in connecting the word *pałuba* with Angelika, his late wife transforms, as it were, into an imperfect image of her, into a dead and dumb dummy, a *pałuba* or (by

analogy with Schulz) *manekin*. By associating Angelika with something ordinary and “shoddy”, he apparently wants to close the “Angelika case” in language, too. Some time later, however, he will also consider this innocent association to be one of the main causes of Pawełek’s fatal relationship with Kseńka Pałuba.

Unlike Strumieński, Pawełek does not seem to want to express something specific when using the word *pałuba*:

Pawełek nie znał dokładnie zastosowań słowa “pałuba”, nie oznaczało też ono dlań zrazu nic wstrętnego ani ohydneho, tak że niemal tylko przypadkiem przeniósł je żywcem na obraz Angeliki. Latało mu ono w głowie samopas bez odpowiedniego wyobrażenia, a ponieważ wydawało mu się słowem bądź co bądź niezwykłym, więc szepcił je z tym, co było dlań bezimiennym i również niezwykłym, tj. z obrazem Angeliki. (P 458-459)

(Pawełek did not know the uses of the word “pałuba”, and it did not immediately mean anything horrible or disgusting for him, so he almost only accidentally and integrally applied it to Angelika’s image. It flew around in his head unguardedly and without any corresponding representation, and since it seemed to him to be an unusual word after all, he connected it with something that for him was anonymous and unusual at the same time, that is, with Angelika’s image.)

After the museum has been closed down by Strumieński and mainly under the influence of his father’s hinting at the “Angelika case”, Pawełek increasingly starts to associate the word with all kinds of inappropriate meanings, as a result of which his positive memory of the image in the museum transforms into something mysterious and disgusting against his will. As he gets in touch with Kseńka, whom the shepherds also use to nickname *pałuba* (in the sense of “shrew”, “hag”), a “huge cataclysm” (“wielki kataklizm”) takes place inside him, after which he concludes “that this is not another, but the same Pałuba” (“iż to jest ta sama a nie inna Pałuba”; P 466). Although both of Pawełek’s fascinations (for Angelika’s image and for Kseńka) seem to have something in common through the association with one single word, their respective objects are completely different: while Kseńka quite simply is responsible for Pawełek’s sexual initiation, Angelika is but a phantom who haunts his imagination. Or as the narrator stresses, “in fact this was not the same case anymore, but a new one, a new piece of reality with its own autonomy, so Pawełek’s history, which is entitled “Angelika-Pałuba” on the outside, only superficially radiates uniformity” (“[w]łaściwie nie była to już ta sama sprawa, ale nowa, nowy płat rzeczywistości, o własnej autonomii, [...] a historia Pawełka, zatytułowana na zewnątrz “Angelika-Pałuba”, błyszczy tylko pozorną jednością”; P 468).

What Irzykowski suggests is that both Strumieński and Pawełek establish the “pseudoconnections” between Angelika and Kseńka merely on acoustic facts (the “unusual” sound of *pałuba*). Hence, all additional emotions and meanings that are subsequently associated with (the complex surrounding) this word are merely artificial “constructions” that do not correspond with reality. What the reader can learn from this is that he should not put a particular meaning on the word *pałuba*. In an important passage in which the choice of the title of the novel is explained, the narrating “author” stresses that the only criterion was to “drum into the reader the matter that he wanted to raise” (“wbić w pamięć czytelnika to, co chciał wyłuszczyć”; P 482). As the novel’s theme is the absence of any theme (the “disintegration of any thematicity” / “rozchwianie się tematowości”), the “author” opts for *pałuba* because “something which itself is different from anything else should also have a name which is different from anything else” (“to, co samo nie jest do niczego podobne, powinno mieć także nazwę do niczego niepodobną”; P483). In other words, the “author” acts in exactly the same way as Pawełek: he arbitrarily selects a name for his “case” (the novel he is writing), which is as “unusual” as what it is supposed to designate. However, because he is merely an “actor” who plays a “role” in his text, he cannot prevent himself from making illusory associations as well.

At a certain point, for instance, the narrating “author” reduces the numerous meanings (up to ten according to Kłak 1976: 123) of *pałuba* to only three: a pile driving ram, a tailor’s dummy (*manekin*), and a hag (P 458). Although these meanings seem to be selected completely at random from the ones in the dictionaries, they appear to be less accidentally chosen upon closer examination. As we have seen, *pałuba* is used both as a synonym for *manekin* and as a nickname for the loose village idiot Kseńka. Furthermore, the association with the pile driving ram is suggested by the narrator when stating that he wishes to “drum into the reader the matter that he wanted to raise”. In other words, the choice of *pałuba* is not arbitrary at all. One could argue that the novel did not necessarily need a title but that the title needed a novel: the word *pałuba* has produced a

heterogeneous novel of the same name. Due to its polysemy, the word lends itself to ever new variations and, as a consequence, to the intended “disintegration of any thematicity”. As a result of every subsequent variation by the narrator or interpretation by the reader, however, the meaning of the word becomes more complete (it “reintegrates”, as Schulz would have it), which makes it comparable to the “original word” (“pierwotne słowo”; 1964: 443) at which Schulz is aiming.

By analogy with Schönle’s analysis of Schulz’s use of *tandeta* and *manekin*, therefore, one could argue that *pałuba* “represents a sign only partially oriented towards its signified, remains vaguely motivated, while already including some conventionality, and thus draws some attention on its signifying shape as such” (1991: 132). In his article on the technique of *stylizacja* (cf. supra), Kłosiński interprets the function of *pałuba* in a similar way:

Funkcja tego słowa, które jest przezwą, staje się imieniem, w końcu tytułem książki, od którego pochodzi kluczowa kategoria podmiotu (pierzwiastek pałubiczny), pozostaje funkcją czystego *signifiant*. [...] W symbolice przestrzennej charakteryzuje go ruch z dołu do góry, od chłopów do Pawełka [...], od Pawełka do Strumieńskiego [...], od Strumieńskiego do autora, od autora do słowników [...], jakby od natury do kultury. (2000: 35-36)

(The function of this word, which begins as a nickname, then becomes a name, and eventually the title of the work, of which even the narrator’s key concept (the *palubic* element) is derived, continues to be the function of a pure *signifiant*. In the spatial symbolics it is characterized by a bottom-up movement, from the peasants to Pawełek, from Pawełek to Strumieński, from Strumieński to the author, from the author to the dictionaries, as it were from nature to culture.)

According to Kłosiński, Irzykowski’s novel also illustrates how each word originates from acoustic stimuli (in this case from the succession of “a” and “u”), and in this way, it even offers some kind of “meticulous reconstruction of the fortunes of the word and its changing meanings” (“dokładna rekonstrukcja losów słowa i jego zmiennych znaczeń”; 2000: 36). One of these meanings – a “hood” of a carriage – even turns *pałuba* into a symbol of the “word” itself, which is also some kind of “covering” or “mould” with a variable content. Just like *tandeta* imposes a loose and provisional form upon matter, *pałuba* symbolizes the formative word, the word that has not yet fossilized into a fixed meaning. Instead of *conventionally* referring to the final *product* of (literary) communication, both deliberately *unconventional* concepts apparently focus on the semantic *process* itself. Within the respective texts, they function as metaphors of maximal arbitrariness: by constantly postponing their final *signifiés*, they reveal themselves as “pure *signifiants*”. In their role of a covering or loose form for ever new but equally provisional contents, they initiate a complex textual process. The provisional texts that result from this process (the actual works of both authors) may be merely read in their *transformacyjność* (cf. supra), as a “migration of forms” (cf. supra) or infinite dissemination of signifiers that refer to anything and nothing at the same time. Without the metaphors that have initiated the entire process, the reader would be lost. In other words, after *pałuba* and *tandeta* have played their metaphorical role, they reflexively start focusing attention on themselves. By exposing their maximal arbitrariness they have transformed (in the reader’s eyes) from meaningless coverings into a powerful experience of reality, or as Stala puts it with reference to Schulz’s metaphors: “The word, returning to reality from its metaphorical journey is no longer the same word; it is the liberated, forming and creative word, full of energy” (1993: 92).

The role that *pałuba* and *tandeta* perform in their respective literary realities is indeed thoroughly ambivalent. Although both words continually aim at concretization, at *mimesis* and *semiosis*, they eventually always withdraw from this ill-fated mission. In this way, they implicitly criticize any construction of meaning that does pretend to bring this circle to a closure. This critical function is, of course, primarily directed against any literary text and its concretization by the reader. Against the illusion of an authentic reality which the reader of a narrative is traditionally pursuing, both concepts oppose their plea in favour of an art that is as inauthentic as possible, an art that does not aspire to coincide with the object to which it refers and evokes this illusion only to immediately expose it. This attitude not only reveals itself in these works’ own artificial and “shoddy” form (for both words are part of a subcultural, “ordinary” and even vulgar dimension of language), but also even more in their most striking incarnation: the *manekin* or (tailor’s) dummy.

In his illuminating article on the concept of *tandeta* in Schulz’s fiction, Schönle has convincingly determined the semiotic value of the “trashy” or “carelessly executed” tailor’s dummy as

opposed to the waxwork figure, which is supposed to be nearly identical to its model. As Jacob argues in ‘Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies’, the waxworks are “fairground parodies of dummies” (CF 35; “kalwaryjskie parodie manekinów”; SC 87) because they are forced to be fully similar to an unattainable model. In other words, whereas the waxwork tries to conceal at any cost the inevitable dissimilarities from its model, the tailor’s dummy continuously displays its mere referential task. According to Schönle (cf. *supra*), the reflexive dimension of the latter way of representing man should be clear:

Put into the vocabulary of semiotics, the waxwork is a sign transparent towards its signified, since it is motivated by a full visual similarity, whereas the dummy represents a sign only partially oriented towards its signified, remains vaguely motivated, while already including some conventionality, *and thus draws some attention on its signifying shape as such*. (1991: 132; italics mine)

Undoubtedly, many readers will be tempted to interpret Jacob’s preference for the tailor’s dummy as an unequivocal plea for “antimimetic” or abstract forms of art because the *manekin* could be considered an abstract representation of man. Upon closer examination, however, father’s argument appears to be more subtle. More specifically, Jacob seeks not the (supposedly artistic) creation of tailors’ dummies “in the image and likeness” of man but just the opposite – viz., the establishment of a “*generatio aequivoca*” (SC 89) by re-creating man “in the image and likeness of a tailor’s dummy” (“na obraz i podobieństwo manekina”; SC 83). Hence, what he seems to be attacking is not so much the faithful depiction of man (as in traditional mimesis) but *any* artistic depiction of man, which is always but an artificial copy of a (mental) picture of real man – of a provisional abstraction “for one gesture, for one word alone” (CF 32; “dla jednego gestu, dla jednego słowa”; SC 82). In Jacob’s opinion, when compared to God’s “first” creation, *any* kind of human creation is secondary and inauthentic, and the best man can do is to reveal the inauthenticity of his creation as much as possible.

It should be clear that Schulz rejects the conventional creation of “illusions of humans” (that is, of puppets) in favor of the creation of “illusions of illusions of humans” (that is, of copies of puppets). In other words, instead of modeling his literary world and its inhabitants after the real world, he prefers to use artistic (man-made) products as a model. Moreover, by choosing the explicitly artificial tailor’s dummy as a model (instead of the more perfect waxwork figure, as the realistic writer unconsciously does), it is more likely that the reader will perceive the intended “illusion of an illusion of man” than some new illusion (of an authentic puppet). Obviously, Schulz’s approach is also more subtly reflexive when compared, for instance, to a painting which directly depicts both another painting and a painter’s easel or a novel which includes not only the representation of a fictional reality but also a description of the artistic genesis of this literary construction (as Irzykowski has done). In all these examples, however, the same artistic principle is at work: instead of denying that what has been portrayed is merely a construction of reality (as in Realism), reflexive forms of art expose their delusive practices in one way or another.

In Schulz’s fiction, the technique of creating “in the image and likeness of a tailor’s dummy” reveals itself most prominently in the exposure of the inadequacies of reality, of its *tandetność*. As for the characters inhabiting his literary world, their artificiality and defectiveness is almost complete; some of them (e.g. father, aunt Perasia, uncle Edward) are ruled by what Schulz himself (in his essay for Witkiewicz) has called the principle of “panmasquerade” (“panmaskarada”; 1964: 682), which makes them assume new masks again and again, whereas others clearly display physical deficiencies (e.g., Edzio, Dodo) or even explicit “mannequinesque” traits: in ‘August’ (‘Sierpień’), for instance, the narrator reports of his cousin Łucja that “[s]he stretched out to [him] a small doll-like hand” (CF 9; “[p]odała [mu] rączkę lalkowatą”; SC 55).

Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the material side of Schulz’s literary world. The illusoriness and defectiveness of the setting in which the subsequent stories take place can best be observed in the periphery, on the margins of the represented world. Indeed, like a painting which betrays its own construction the most at its margins (where the frame begins and the order of the work merges with the chaos of reality), Schulz’s fictional settings display their shoddiness particularly on the outskirts. In ‘The Street of Crocodiles’, for example, the narrator offers a description of a peripheral city district on the basis of an old map of his hometown. In this part of town, the degree of imitativeness is almost unlimited:

Jest to szary dzień, jak zawsze w tej okolicy, i cała sceneria wydaje się chwilami fotografią z ilustrowanej gazety, tak szare, tak płaskie są domy, ludzie i pojazdy. Ta rzeczywistość jest cienka jak papier i wszystkimi szparami zdradza swą imitacyjność. Chwilami ma się wrażenie, że tylko na małym skrawku przed nami układa się wszystko przykładowie w ten pointowany obraz bulwaru wielkomińskiego, gdy tymczasem już na bokach rozwiązuje się i rozprzega ta zaimprovizowana maskarada i, niezdolna wytrwać w swej roli, rozpada się za nami w gips i pakuły, w rupieciarnię jakiegoś ogromnego pustego teatru. Napięcie pozy, sztuczna powaga maski, ironiczny patos drży na tym naskórku. (SC 127)

(It is, as usual in that district, a grey day, and the whole scene seems at times like a photograph in an illustrated magazine, so grey, so one-dimensional are the houses, the people and the vehicles. Reality is as thin as paper and betrays with all its cracks its imitative character. At times one has the impression that it is only the small section immediately before us that falls into the expected pointillistic picture of a city thoroughfare, while on either side, the improvised masquerade is already disintegrating and, unable to endure, crumbles behind us into plaster and sawdust, into the lumber room of an enormous, empty theatre. The tenseness of an artificial pose, the assumed earnestness of a mask, an ironical pathos tremble on this façade; CF 67-68)

Such descriptions perfectly illustrate Schulz's method of using a "trashy" (*tandemny*), explicitly artificial version of reality as a model for literary mimesis rather than reality itself. Moreover, in much the same way as the tailor's dummy, this kind of setting may evoke a double perception: on the one hand, the temporary illusion of a human being (in the case of the dummy) or a real (big) city thoroughfare (in the case of the Street of Crocodiles district), and on the other hand, the enduring reality of a shoddy artifact – made of "plaster and sawdust".

Although Irzykowski's techniques are often less subtle, his novel does not pretend to be more than merely an inauthentic image of the construction that "rests somewhere in [his] head in a completely different form" (cf. supra). By analogy with Schulz's stories the "monstrous ruin" (cf. supra) entitled *Patuba* incessantly exposes its own secondary, "derivative" character. First of all, the narrating "author" regularly betrays his literary sources of inspiration, from which he now and then directly quotes. Furthermore, many of the works of art that turn up in the novel appear to be thoroughly "shoddy". This is certainly the case for the literary works that Gasztold and Strumieński produce, both of which are based on second-rate models from the popular circuit and which the narrator criticizes as worthless efforts that would better not be published. 'The Dreams of Maria Dunin', then, abounds in inconsequences and eventually turns out to be a mystification. Angelika, who shares both her first and surname with the historical painter Angelika Kauffmann (1741-1807) and as such is already some kind of "copy", is openly accused of plagiarism at a certain point. Angelika's museum appears to contain for the most part all kinds of trash and kitsch. Apart from the exotic knickknacks and Angelika's pathological portraits and landscapes it also accommodates a remarkable "plaster moulding representing a man who was sculpturing himself in stone" ("odlew gipsowy, który przedstawiał człowieka wykuwającego samego siebie w kamieniu"; P 167). What makes this example so worth mentioning is not only its imitative and "kitschy" nature but also most of all its reflexive dimension, as if Irzykowski wished to evoke some kind of plastic equivalent of his own novel.

The most striking manifestation of *manekinowość* ("dummy-likeness") is the image of Angelika that Strumieński creates through an optical illusion. Whereas the image of his dead wife until then had only existed as an ideal construction in his head, he now transforms it into an inferior, overtly artificial variant:

Tłumaczył Oli cały mechanizm optyczny. Że rzecz nie polega wcale na jakichś wynalazkach, które mają być dopiero wynalezione, jak cudowności Poego lub Vernego, ale na znanych już fenomenach, na interferencji światła i na sekretnych farbach profesora Lipmanna, i wcale nie wymaga koncesji prawdopodobieństwa. Ola niewiele z tego rozumiała, ale rozumiała przecież tyle, że cudowność nie odgrywa tu żadnej roli, i jej oczekiwania zawiodły ją nieco, zwłaszcza gdy Strumieński kładł nacisk na tę naturalność, tj. tak zwaną sztuczność zjawiska. (P 364-365)

(He explained the complete optical mechanism to Ola. That it had nothing to do with any particular inventions that still had to be discovered, like the curiosities of Poe and Verne, but with existing phenomena, with the interference of light and with the secret colors of professor Lipmann, and that it did not require any concessions to probability. Ola did not understand a lot of this, but she did nonetheless understand that it had nothing to do with illusionism, and she was slightly disappointed, particularly when Strumieński emphasized this naturalness, that is, the so-called artificiality of the phenomenon.)

After this explanation, the confusion turns out to be almost complete. Although the image is characterized as completely natural and authentic, it actually is a visualization of Strumieński's ideal image of his wife and as such should be considered an inauthentic construction "to the second power" when compared to the "real" Angelika. In fact, both interpretations of the optical illusion are correct: either one ignores the underlying construction and perceives an authentic optical effect or one becomes aware of the double defectiveness of the image with regard to its original (cf. the *manekin* as an "illusion of an illusion of man"). Strumieński initially still defends the authenticity and mimetic power of the spectacle, but by renaming the image into a "dead dummy" and a "stupid *pałuba*" (cf. supra), he exposes his work as a mystification and once again yields to the power of the "*pałubic* element".

Conclusion

As we have seen, although the works of Irzykowski and Schulz do not seem to have a lot in common, both authors in a similar way put into perspective all possible cultural constructions and "stylizations" (words, ideas, texts, etc.) As the relativistic and cultural critical discourse of both authors is represented in the form of a narrative, this critique is primarily directed against all "actors" that play a "role" in the "game", which this literary construction appears to be: the author and his text, the narrator and his story, the characters and their reality. Because the text continually displays its own artificiality and its own two-dimensional nature, the reader may realize that his reading of this text, of every text, and by extension of every cultural construction is merely a temporary "pose" or a necessary "comedy". Unable to trace back the horizontal orientation of the text (its palimpsests, cryptograms, and arabesques) to a stable semantic core, he cannot but activate, for the duration of his reading, the "mediocre", "shoddy", and "inauthentic" artifact at hand as an aesthetic object. Or as Irzykowski almost casually puts it in his novel: "Do you feel the poetry of this apoetry after all?" ("Czy jednak czujecie poezję tej apoezji?"; P 435).

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