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Differencing Schulz. On the Writer's First and Other Body

The dissertation is divided into two complementary parts: concerning erotic and thanatical motives in Bruno Schulz's artistic and literary output. The main interpretive category used in the essays is "writer's body". However, it is understood in two ways – as a "first body", a biological one, a "place of existence", and as an "other body", an aesthetic one, recaptured and recreated by Schulz in his work. The writer's first and second bodies do not exist separately. They are not opposites of each other, although they are also not fully identical. One is not trying to cannibalistically devour the other. Rather, they should be seen as two bodies always facing each other, touching and rubbing themselves, differentiating. Yet, these meetings are never indifferent. It can be seen especially in the self-portraits of Schulz – for years multiplied in drawings, graphics and illustrations for the stories. In the writer's self-portraits, both bodies attain the highest degree of intensity typical for some touches of hate and love.

The first part of the dissertation deals with the Schulz's depiction of the body in relation to the sexual and gender difference. It is important to recognize the underlying ambivalence here. Despite the fact that – on the level of plots – men are almost always in a position of weakness or humiliation towards female figures, the model of representation of the female body remains rather male-centered. The narrator Józef, like the graphic artist, whose face is often seen among idolaters, is the ruler of the "male gaze" in the world of his representations. His eye – just like a camera lens – transforms a female body into a screen onto which he projects his erotic imaginary.

In turn, those female bodies that do not conform to the rigors of his gaze, such as the "fertile" and "fleshy" body of Aunt Agata or the animal body of Thuja, remain outside of Schulz's erotic play. The most intense erotic stimuli are provided by the narrator and his protagonists from point observations, preferably carried out from a distance and from hiding. The untouchability of the female body seems to be necessary for Schulz to intensify and maintain the state of erotic desire. There is no question of the consensuality of bodies, which is sometimes postulated by female researchers and artists – including those identifying with "female pornography".

Schulz's erotic imagination reproduces repetitive and limited corporeality. The „doll-like” bodies of Adela, Polda and Paulina are condensed images of desire to the extent that they are emblematic – immobilized in conventional, perfectly legible poses and gestures, to which Schulz ostentatiously returns and which he intensifies precisely in repetitions. They are

condensed images also because they are summarized in a few schematic depiction models typical of the aesthetics of pop culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – including boudoir novels, advertising and pornography. This schematicity of erotic bodies in Schulz’s prose and graphics is not free from the misogynistic phantasms of modernism. At the same time, however, it allows us to think about the pastiche, provocation, camp. It happens that also in eroticism, as in all of Schulz’s works, the rule of “global masquerade”, about which Schulz wrote to Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, is realized: “There is a constant atmosphere of the backstage, where the actors, after throwing off the costumes, laugh at the pathos of their roles.”

The second part of the dissertation takes up the problem of Schulz’s thanatic imaginary. There is a strong tradition of reading Schulz as an author who constantly (and intentionally) expels death from his work. However, I argue against such an opinion. On the contrary, I try to reveal those themes and figures, both in Schulz’s stories and drawings, that refer to the thanatic imagination, not literally though, but rather in a way described by the French philosopher and critic Michel Guiomar as an “obscure vicinity of death” evoked by the work of art. These are, for example, the elegiac-ironic convention of “Autumn” and “The Homecoming”, as well as the funeral mood and death symbols in “The Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass” or in highly transgressive parts of “Spring”. I also address questions concerning Schulz’s personal outlook on death and afterlife, which seems to link together the need for consolation and fascination with death.

I continue this reflection in two essays addressing the mourning cult of Bruno Schulz. The presented approach is critical of its excess in the Schulzean biographical discourses as well as literary and artistic references to his life and work, but it is by no means provocative like that of Janusz Rudnicki, who in the 1990s mocked the “hagiographic” idiom of Jerzy Ficowski. Analyzing archive records and testimonies, I attempt to reconstruct the circumstances of Schulz’s death in possibly the minutest details. Comparing contradictory pieces of information with the official version made popular by Ficowski, I show how profoundly it has been marked by the unperformed work of mourning over Schulz and the Holocaust – both the failed work of Ficowski himself and of his postwar correspondents whose letters determined the form of *The Regions of Great Heresy*. Using the idiom of thanatology and taking the role of a necrographer rather than that of a Schulz specialist, I suppose that the dynamic of loss in the case of Schulz reaches far beyond the act of the writer’s execution on the street to include also the posthumous annihilation of his corpse and grave. This particular kind of necroviolence, perhaps the most hateful from the vantage point of the Jewish tradition and the heritage of Western culture in

general, which consists in removing the material remains of the deceased has been called by Holocaust scholars “necroicide.”

The absence of material traces and the “mourning objects” that usually help to cure the semiotic crisis which is death makes writers and artists commemorate Schulz with lyrical and artistic epitaphs. Their function is to restore the bodily identity of the dead person by creating his other body, told about and imagined *in effigie*, existing not beside but instead of the missing “mourning object.” However, the expansion of those elegiac narratives, particularly those produced outside Poland, often results in unintended reductionism. As a human being, writer, and artist, Schulz has been reduced in them to an emblem of the Holocaust, while such obituaries ignore the history of his archive. The other, historical and material body of the writer consists of his manuscripts, drawings, graphic works, and official documents. It exists, drawn and quartered, in archives, to be put up for auction for tens of thousands of dollars, exposed in museums and art galleries, and hoarded by collectors as precious relics.