BRUNO SCHULZ

# The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories

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PENGUIN BOOKS

us," Kafka famously wrote. Schulz's two slim books are the sharpest axes I've ever come across. I encourage you to split the chopping block using them.

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

# Introduction

The town of Drohobych where Bruno Schulz lived—with its magical cinnamon shops, chimeric automobiles, Street of Crocodiles, pockets of suspended time, circus performers, imperious women, and luminous books—was, in reality, alongside the neighboring town of Borysław, a provincial center of the oil industry. From Schulz's birth on July 12, 1892, through his assassination by a Nazi officer on November 19, 1942, and in the years since, Drohobych has had a number of different political affiliations: it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then belonged to restored Poland after World War I, then became Soviet-occupied territory after the Nazi invasion of Poland, and then Nazi-occupied territory until the end of World War II, ultimately becoming part of Soviet Ukraine after the war, and modern Ukraine today. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it had a population of about 20,000, 40 percent of which was Jewish, and the remainder about evenly split between ethnic Poles and Ukrainians, with a smaller population of Russians as well as a few representatives of Austrian, French, and American oil companies.

The richness of Schulz's symbolic world is a testament to this fecund and diverse cultural environment. Schulz was a secular Jewish writer whose stories began to take shape as letters to the Yiddish modernist poet Debora Vogel, but he wrote them in Polish and was celebrated in Polish avant-garde circles, and the most extensive tradition of Schulz scholarship is in Polish. His work reflects the influence of the German writer Thomas Mann, as well as Franz Kafka and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (the author of *Venus in Furs*), both German-language writers of

non-German cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—Prague and Lemberg (Lviv), respectively.

The predominant view of Bruno Schulz is that of an introvert who was so immersed in the imaginative world he had created for himself in Drohobych that he did not seek fame or much in the way of a life outside of his hometown. What we know of Schulz's life and what we have of his letters and drawings comes mainly from the lifetime of tireless searching for artifacts and interviewing of anyone who had contact with Schulz by Schulz's biographer, the poet Jerzy Ficowski. Childhood illnesses necessitated occasional long absences from school. Schulz did spend many hours of his youth reading in the back office of Pilpel's bookstore, so even if he could not afford to travel or to purchase books about the wider world, he did not lack for curiosity. His only significant journeys outside the regions of Galicia, Poland, and what was then German Silesia, were a brief excursion to Stockholm in 1936, and three weeks in Paris in the late summer of 1938, when many Parisians would have been on vacation. It is important to note, however, that on his modest salary as teacher of drawing, art, and occasionally mathematics in the public Gymnasium, Schulz was not really in a position to travel extensively before he had achieved significant recognition as a writer with the publication of his first collection, *Cinnamon Shops* (retitled *The Street of Crocodiles* in U.S. editions). After this, he repeatedly applied for a leave of absence from his teaching duties to pursue his writing, noting the importance of dedicating all of his efforts to this new work, and of spending more time in contact with leading intellectuals and cultural figures in cities such as Warsaw and Lviv. Recent attention, though, to the 1936 period when Schulz was finally granted a semester's leave spent mainly in Warsaw, looks at the book reviews that he wrote for *Wiadomości Literackie* (*Literary News*), and a series of lesser-known political essays about Poland's interwar leader, Józef Piłsudski, that he wrote for *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* (*Illustrated Weekly*), and suggests that perhaps Schulz did seek wider recognition but was thwarted by the outbreak of the war at the height of the fame he had achieved in his lifetime.[1] In a letter to the Board of Education dated November 30, 1936, requesting a transfer to Lviv, which was an important cultural center, Schulz expressed his willingness even to take a position in a vocational or elementary school in order to get out of Drohobych. As it happened, there were no positions available in secondary schools at the time, and he would have had to apply to vocational or primary schools to obtain the transfer, which would likely have been granted. Even in 1938, when modest fame had elevated his status at the Gymnasium to the position of professor, Schulz had to weigh the attractions of three weeks in Paris against the purchase of a new sofa, which he would never have a chance to acquire.



The radiant literary and visual remains of Bruno Schulz's life form a relatively modest corpus that appeared over the course of a mere twenty years, counting from his first visual art exhibition, or only nine years counting from his literary debut. He produced hundreds of drawings, some of which he reproduced using the method of *cliché verre* in the form of a volume entitled *The Booke of Idolatry*. He created a set of illustrations for Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke*. His first exhibition of graphic works took place in 1922, in Warsaw at the Society to Promote Fine Arts, and he continued to show and sell his work through the 1920s. It is known that he painted in oils, and at least one such painting survives. The two collections of stories included in this volume—*The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*—constitute the bulk of Schulz's known fiction. Some stories—"Autumn," "The Republic of Dreams," "The Comet," and "The Fatherland"—appeared separately in various journals. A few critical essays and enough letters to comprise a volume of a few hundred pages have been collected. Murals that Schulz painted during World War II in the apartment of Felix Landau, a Nazi officer who protected him for part of the occupation, have recently been uncovered, with considerable controversy surrounding their ownership. Rumors surface periodically of the lost manuscript of a novel, *The Messiah*, a copy of which he is said to have sent to Thomas Mann.

*The Street of Crocodiles*, published originally as a collection in December 1933 (with a date of 1934), coalesced as a series of letters—most of which are now lost—to his friend and confidante Debora Vogel. (Schulz and Vogel might have married had her family been amenable, according to Ficowski.) Some of the stories in Schulz's correspondence with Vogel were likely drafted prior to that correspondence, but having been rewritten, and then published as a collection with Vogel's encouragement along with that of important writers like Stanistaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, known as Witkacy, and the novelist Zofia Nałkowska—who may be credited with launching Schulz's brief literary career—the work attained greater coherence and might be read as a cycle.

*Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, published in 1937, contains stories written in the late 1920s, before Schulz's correspondence with Vogel, including most probably "A Night in July," "My Father Joins the Fire Brigade," "A Second Fall," "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," "Dodo," "Eddie," "The Old Age Pensioner," and "Loneliness." This might lead to the conclusion that as a collection, *Sanatorium* constitutes less of a unified act of creation than *The Street of Crocodiles*, assembled from new and old material to fill out a book-length volume in time to take advantage of the publicity resulting from the success of his first volume, but again we might bear in mind the fact that all of Schulz's prose fiction was composed in a very short period of time. Themes and images overlap across works as the product of a single mind.

The interwar period was a time of great literary and artistic experimentation in Poland, as it was in the rest of Europe. It was likely Schulz's success as a graphic artist that led to his acquaintance, around 1925, with Witkacy—the son of Poland's leading modernist painter and critic, Stanisław Witkiewicz, and one of the most radical figures of the interwar avant-garde—a painter, photographer, dramatist, novelist, and philosopher. Witkacy joined the debate over "form" in this period rather stridently with his theory of "Pure Form," which is not so much a way of distinguishing "form" from "content," as one



might expect, but a kind of artistic representation that can be taken in whole and without mediation, producing "the metaphysical feeling of the strangeness of existence." This idea is rooted most deeply in the theory of the Sublime, but perhaps more immediately in the aesthetics of Expressionism—the idea that a painting like Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is not a representation of a man screaming into the fjord, but is in fact itself a scream. The key theorist of Expressionism was the Polish writer Stanisław Przybyszewski, of the literary generation before Witkacy and Schulz, who wrote the text for Munch's first Berlin exhibition and is said to have suggested the concrete name *The Scream* for Munch's most famous painting, over Munch's original, emotive title *Despair*. Witkacy argued that poetry, painting, and drama were capable of Pure Form, while prose in general could at best only represent the experience of the individual in the face of Pure Form—the exception being Schulz's prose, which possessed this quality of poetry for Witkacy.

The following frequently quoted passage from Schulz's essay "The Mythicization of Reality" brings into clearer view Schulz's contribution to the debate about form, and illuminates Schulz's understanding of his own art:

> Every fragment of reality lives by virtue of partaking in a universal sense. . . . Poetry happens when short-circuits of Sense occur between words, a sudden regeneration of the primeval myths. . . . Not one scrap of an idea of ours does not originate in myth, isn't transformed, mutilated, denatured mythology. The most fundamental function of the spirit is inventing fables, creating tales. . . . [T]he building materials [that the search for human knowledge] uses were used once before; they come from forgotten, fragmented tales or "histories." Poetry recognizes these lost meanings, restores words to their places, connects them by the old semantics.

Schulz maintains that, when viewed through the "poetic" imagination, any degraded scrap of reality—anything that might be found in the world's *tandeta*, a Polish word describing

goods that are shoddy, cast off, second-rate, or trashy—might reveal the qualities of the sublime. *Tandeta* also means "market," in Schulz usually a flea market, but also a stock or commodities market—a chaotic place of haggling and bargaining. In the childlike mind of Schulz's narrator, the trash at a flea market becomes an object of wonder, a key to a whole system of meaning, and a portal to the sublime. Immanuel Kant describes the sublime as awe in the face of what is infinitely great or terrible as opposed to the pleasurable feeling of the free play of the imagination associated with beauty. A tulip inspires the feeling of beauty, but a storm or a mountain range inspires the feeling of the sublime. To offer another point of reference, Roland Barthes has a stronger idea than Schulz of a *mythologie* as a system of meaning, but they both share the notion that the poetic gesture can reveal the mythic potential in everyday phenomena and objects. For Schulz's child narrator, a cheap calendar, a travel guide, or an advertisement for a hair growth formula—in short, "trash" or *tandeta*—can be a work of splendor.

A particularly poignant symbol of the mythic potential of all matter in Schulz is the figure of the *paluba*. *Paluba* is a word so untranslatable that Celina Wieniewska cannot settle on a single English word for it, and sometimes simply passes it over. One scholar of Schulz, Jerzy Jarzębski, has said that *paluba* is a Polish word that must be translated into Polish every time it is used. In the relevant sense, it might be translated as "hag" or "witch," or it could refer to an effigy or doll in the form of a hag. In section two of the story "August," for instance, Schulz describes a garden—"There, those protuberant [*paluby* of] bur clumps spread themselves like resting peasant women, half-enveloped in their own swirling skirts." The untranslated image suggested here is of a rough-hewn folk doll.

The term *paluba* enters the language of Polish modernism as the title of a radically experimental novel first published in 1903 in Lviv by the critic and essayist Karol Irzykowski. The novel begins with a dream sequence, followed by a psychoanalytic biography of the main character, and then layers of notes and pseudo-scholarship amending and correcting the previous text. Irzykowski was not otherwise known for fiction, though he was one of the first European critics to write about cinema in a serious way. While his novel is not well known outside of Poland, it signaled the break with historical and psychological realism that would free writers like Witkacy, Witold Gombrowicz, and Schulz to invent new forms of prose fiction, and Schulz in fact mentions Irzykowski's novel in his review of Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke*.



The word *paluba* figures most prominently in Schulz in "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies." The waxwork figures that Schulz mentions are *paluby* of a very interesting sort. They are cast from underlying stories. The wax museum might be seen as a form of Schulz's "splendorous book," rendered in three dimensions. Schulz writes: "Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life. We, on the contrary, love its creaking, its resistance, its [*palubiasta*] clumsiness"—again, the elusive hag, here as an adjective, is lost in translation. A few pages later, the author of the treatise asks, "Can you imagine the pain, the dull imprisoned suffering, hewn into the matter of that dummy [*paluba*] which does not know why it must be what it is, why it must remain in that forcibly imposed form which is no more than a parody?" This characterization of the dummies might just as well apply to the father's birds, since they resemble stuffed museum specimens and also share something in common with the myth of the golem, an artificial creation whose narratives in some versions have been retellings of the Genesis myth of the divine creation of man. These dummies (*paluby*) are not the same as the dummies (*manekin*, "mannequins") of the title, but powerful effigies, commensurate with the inchoate power of matter imprisoned in form.

The idea from Schulz's essay "The Mythicization of Reality" that words have meaning by virtue of their connection to an "all embracing, integral mythology" or "universal sense" resonates with other modernist notions of the primitive in language and art, ranging from T. S. Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative"—the idea that poetry works by means of verbal objects that can evoke a single emotion in the mind of the poet and the reader; to Ezra Pound's fascination with the concrete image

as artifact; to J. G. A. Frazer's theory, cataloged in *The Golden Bough*, of universal mythologies shared by cultures that had no historical contact but that had common experiences of nature that led to a common set of mythic master narratives; to C. G. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, which proposed that common mythic narratives or "archetypes" grounded all mental and social life. Words, fragments of their former mythic selves, "complete [themselves] with sense" for Schulz when they are successfully transformed by the poet's fashioning hand.

Schulz can also be understood in relation to Franz Kafka, another prose writer who dealt in surrealistic metamorphoses and the sense of awe in the face of the infinitely great. Schulz collaborated with Józefina Szelińska, to whom he was formally engaged from 1936 to 1937, on a translation of Kafka's *The Trial*, published in Lviv in 1936. Ficowski argues that the work was mainly Szelińska's—that Schulz lent his name to the project to improve its chances for publication—and goes to some length to differentiate what he reads as Kafka's idealistic absolutism, in contrast to Schulz's rootedness in the "reality-asylum" or a concentrated and heightened sense of the material of life. Ficowski concedes, however, that Schulz admired Kafka's work, and there is plenty of room for interpretation of this connection.

Schulz was also very much inspired by the work of Thomas Mann, who recast biblical narrative in novelistic form in *Joseph and His Brothers*. We might find this influence in Schulz's use of the the Jacob and Joseph story or other images from Genesis and Exodus, but Mann's gesture is to bring epic narrative into the realm of the real and familiar, to imagine the psychological motivations of biblical characters. Schulz's gesture is more one of estrangement and defamiliarization, to take a character embedded in reality, like the eccentric figure of the father, and make him into a mighty prophet or a medieval rabbinic authority on obscure metaphysical questions.

The relatively self-contained quality of Schulz's small body of work, the idea of the creation of a mythic world, and the resonance between the verbal and the visual might invite a comparison to William Blake. As with Blake, at least on Northrop Frye's seminal reading in his book *Fearful Symmetry*, the task of the reader and viewer of Schulz's work might be to make sense of his personal mythology, to reassemble its fragments into so many simultaneous narratives, and then to consider the effect of their fragmentation. A thoroughgoing enumeration of Schulz's mythologies could fill a volume as thick as Frye's. For the sake of an introduction to the mythic imagination of Bruno Schulz, we might limit ourselves to a few predominant leitmotifs and keywords: the Book, the Labyrinth, Franz Joseph and the language of the empire, the dominant woman, and the birds.

The Book: When Schulz writes of books, which are both sources of myth and myths in themselves, he calls them *księgi*, rather than the more common diminutive *książki*. Any ordinary book is a *książka*, but a *księga* is a great sacred ancient book, like the books of the Bible. Schulz would further emphasize this ancient quality in his early graphic work, *The Booke of Idolatry*, by using the archaic spelling, *xięga*, employing the "x" that has been eradicated from modern Polish spelling, perhaps best translated in that instance as "Booke."

The image of The Booke in Schulz's mythic world is like a book of the Talmud—a large folio volume, worn from age and use, where a central text appears in large type at the center surrounded by layers upon layers of commentary and debate among great rabbis and their disciples over centuries, and a wide margin; this inspires his narrator to ask:

> don't I too, surrender to the secret hope that [my words] will merge imperceptibly with the yellowing pages of that most splendid, moldering book, that they will sink into the gentle rustle of its pages and become absorbed there?

But in the childlike mind of Schulz's narrator, recognizing that all poetry is made up of fragments of ancient mythology, virtually any great compendium of arcane mysteries can aspire to the status of The Booke—a calendar, a stamp album, a travel guide, a collection of pornographic images, an ornithological manual.

**The Labyrinth:** Schulz's Drohobych is a labyrinth of labyrinths. The metaphor applies to the map of Drohobych's streets, the interiors of the "cinnamon shops," the strange time-space of the Sanatorium, or the pages of Schulz's Booke. The town with its central market square and labyrinth of streets around it is itself a kind of sacred text. Each shop represents a story, a mythology, and the streets that wind around the margins offer commentary on the center, and within each labyrinth there may be another labyrinth. "In its multiple labyrinths," Schulz writes of his splendorous town, "nests of brightness were hewn: the shops—large colored lanterns—filled with goods and the bustle of customers."

Schulz's dream time is itself a kind of labyrinth, as in the Sanatorium where Jakub seems somehow suspended as the time of everyday life passes him by. Perhaps Schulz's Drohobych takes on this quality, because it was not exactly the Drohobych of everyday life as it was lived in Schulz's own day, but was also the Drohobych narrated by his ailing father, Jakub, a fabric merchant like the father in Schulz's stories, in his final years. Schulz was the youngest of three children, more than ten years younger than his brother, Izydor, or elder sister, Hania, and he knew his father as an older man in declining health. The extra month of "The Night of the Great Season"—a motif borrowed from the Hebrew lunar calendar, which adds an extra month every three years—is a kind of leftover pocket of time when magical events can happen. Time is described in the original Polish text as having "neighborhoods" like the map of the city, which is like the page of Talmud—a labyrinth along every dimension.

**Franz Joseph and the Language of the Empire:** A layer of Schulz's prose that is lost in non-Slavic translation is his peculiar Latinism in Polish. Poland has a rich tradition of Latin poetry from the Renaissance, which devolved into macaronic use of Latin in Polish prose in the Baroque period, but Schulz's Latinisms probably derive more from the bureaucratic language of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The emperor Franz Josef I, mentioned in the story "Spring" as the ubiquitous figure in the stamp album, passed through Schulz's town of Drohobych in



1880, during an extended tour of the Galician oil-producing region, and seems to have left a mark in local legend perhaps as a lesser version of Napoleon Bonaparte, who embodied the *Weltgeist* ("world spirit") for the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel upon passing through Jena after defeating the Prussians. Franz Josef's image was reproduced extensively on stamps and coinage, and Schulz graduated from the Franz Joseph Gymnasium in 1910. He would teach at the same school, rechristened after World War I for the Polish-Lithuanian king Władysław Jagiełło, and renamed again simply for the state during the first Soviet occupation, which began in 1939.

Schulz could draw upon this bureaucratic Latinism as a defamiliarizing gesture, using a word like *kreatura* rather than a more common Slavic term for "creature," or *fluida* rather than the Polish word that is normally applied to things like dishwashing liquid, referring in Schulz's usage alternately to fluids but also to a mystic aura or emanation. The term *panoptikon*, familiar to readers of Michel Foucault as Jeremy Bentham's ideal reformatory where prison cells are arranged in a circle around a central guard tower, but here referring to a circus side show, appears as a word that by virtue of the power of Latin to dignify the object described, in fact degrades its referent. Like P. T. Barnum's famous sign, "This way to the egress," the Latin term is party to a kind of sham, but that sham is just the sort of "degraded reality" that fascinates Schulz. The serious business of petroleum production that was the foundation of Drohobych's economy does not play a major role in Schulz's mythic Drohobych. The fakery at the margins is where the magic is.

**The Dominant Woman:** Adela, the servant girl and obscure object of desire, is Schulz's "demonic woman." Witkacy, Schulz's elder contemporary and advocate, built a mythology around the idea of the dominant female figure, likely taking the term "demonic woman" from a collection of stories by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch translated into Polish as *Demonic Women*. Sacher-Masoch was a native of Lviv—then Lemberg—not far from Schulz's Drohobych or from Witkacy's Kraków or Zakopane in southern Poland, and he wrote extensively about the

local culture even as he became part of the local culture for East Central European modernists.

We might see Adela as the prose version of Undula, the object of worship in *The Booke of Idolatry*. Undula appears nude in high heels and long stockings at the head of a procession of submissive men, as a reclining odalisque with the sole of her foot pressing into the face of a figure who resembles the artist himself (and who also appears in the procession), or in furs like Sacher-Masoch's dominatrix Wanda. In the father's shop in the story "The Night of the Great Season," the assistants chase after Adela as if she were an idol in a scene reminiscent of the worship of the Golden Calf from the book of Exodus. She is often described as "fluttering" like one of the father's birds. Adela is usually recognizable by her broom in theatrical productions and films based on Schulz's writings. When she uses her iconic broom to sweep the attic clean of Father's other birds, she introduces cleanliness and modernity as she puts an end to the old order of the father's "age of genius," the mythic time when wise men could speak the "forgotten language of the birds," a talent attributed to Elijah, Solomon, Orpheus, St. Francis of Assisi, and the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism.

**The Birds:** Schulz's birds come from the pages of another sacred book—the ornithological manual. As Schulz writes in his story "Birds":

> While father pored over his large ornithological textbooks and studied their colored plates, these feathery phantasms seemed to rise from the pages and fill the rooms with colors, with splashes of crimson, strips of sapphire, verdigris, and silver.

The guidebooks that Schulz likely would have known would have been the monumental works of the German ornithologist Anton Reichenow, with their richly colored engravings of birds arranged in unlikely configurations in quasi-naturalistic settings. As a graphic artist himself, Schulz would have admired these engravings after the works of the German wildlife painter Gustav Mützel both for their fine detail and for their flavor of the precursor of the modern natural history museum—the cabinet of curiosities, which was not too distant from the circus side show or *panoptikon*. The composition of these pages was generally like the labyrinth, with the largest, most colorful birds perched at the center, and the lesser ones fluttering at the margins. In the quoted passage from the story "Birds," Schulz moves seamlessly from the book to the fantasy about the birds in Jakub's attic. There are no boundaries between books and the world for Schulz. As the labyrinthine map of Drohobych becomes a page in Schulz's Talmud, the birds on the page inhabit the attic, which becomes a Noah's ark. Following the cycle of "the mythicization of reality," a book becomes a reality, which becomes another book.



The influence of Bruno Schulz's work on later writers might be understood under three main categories. One group consists of Polish and other East European writers whose work is part of a continuous tradition with interwar avant-gardism, who have incorporated Schulz's motifs, compositional techniques, and mythological sense into their own work. These are figures like the Polish visual artist and dramatist Tadeusz Kantor, who plays with Schulz's iconography in his own works for the stage, employing mannequins or an Adela figure with her cleansing broom and chimeric objects like Schulz's camera/car; or the Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš, who finds common ground with Schulz's myth of the book and the image of the hourglass.

Fiction on the other side of the temporal divide created by the Holocaust draws on the element of reassembly of the fragments of a forgotten world that was already part of Schulz's consciousness before the war, and we postwar readers must constantly remind ourselves that this conception of mythology that could so aptly characterize the fragmented and lost world of those who perished under Nazi terror was imagined without any awareness of that terror. The idea we see in Schulz of the writer sifting through the trash—*tandeta*—to find and reassemble mutilated fragments of cast-off mythologies or systems of meaning would become a model for generations of writers following the upheaval of World War II, postcommunism, and even postcolonialism.

Schulz's work and the mysteries of his biography are also the

subject of fascination for a second group: mainly Jewish writers who may know Schulz only in translation and do not have access to the wealth of Polish critical writing on Schulz, or most of the rich context of Polish avant-gardism that forms the foundation for Tadeusz Kantor's work, but find in Schulz a connection to the lost world of pre-Holocaust European Jewry, and see Schulz's death as a particularly poignant symbol of that loss. These would be writers like Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and David Grossman, who use characters based on Bruno Schulz himself in "The Prague Orgy," *The Messiah of Stockholm*, and *See Under: Love*, respectively. In some respects, these writers may be more influenced by Schulz's biographer, Jerzy Ficowski, than by Schulz himself. *The Messiah of Stockholm*, for instance, focuses on the mystery of Schulz's lost manuscript, about which little is known. The manuscript of *The Messiah* can thus serve as a vessel for a metaphor of the tragic end to an age of genius. Schulz is also fascinated with a lost age of genius, but the task for Schulz is its restoration through the poetic, rather than lamentation on the loss.

The most recent examples of Schulz's influence recognize the universal significance of his mythic world, assembled from what seem to be deeply personal and esoteric local references. The best case of this phenomenon is a novel that is itself a bricolage of peculiar local references, Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*.[2] In the last phase of Rushdie's novel, the hero and narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, travels from Cochin, India, to Benengeli, a mountain village in Andalusia, to see Vasco Miranda, a long-lost admirer of his mother's. The village takes on a magical quality not unlike Schulz's Drohobych, particularly in a district called the Street of Parasites, not unlike the "parasitical quarter" that Schulz names the Street of Crocodiles:

> I felt as if I were in some sort of interregnum, in some timeless zone under the sign of an hourglass in which the sand stood motionless, or a clepsydra whose quicksilver had ceased to flow. . . . I wandered down sausage-festooned streets of bakeries and cinnamon shops, smelling, instead, the sweet scents of meat and pastries and fresh-baked bread, and surrendered myself to the cryptic laws of the town. (Rushdie, 404)



The "hourglass" of the title of Schulz's second collection of stories is *klepsydra* in Polish, which can refer either to a sandglass or a mercury or water clock—"clepsydra" in English. "Under the sign of the hourglass" is a fairly common idiom in Polish for referring to a business establishment, usually a cafe or restaurant, denoted by a distinctive sign or architectural ornament above the door, like the "Club under the sign of the Salamanders" on the Kraków market square. What Rushdie borrows from Schulz, however, is not a particular idiom or scenery or biographical detail, but a kind of metaphysical essence of Schulz's imagined world, a sense of suspended time and a feeling of rootedness in displacement itself, which he transposes onto his own historical and cultural context. Rushdie's ability to find that essence in his own fragmented reality as he sorts through his own version of *tandeta* might attest to Schulz's notion of an underlying "universal sense" that the poet or writer seeks to restore to words that have become separated from their lost mythic meanings.

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Anessi takes this approach in an unpublished paper, "The Great Heresy of the Varsovian Center," presented at the conference *The World of Bruno Schulz/Bruno Schulz and the World: Influences, Similarities, Reception*, Catholic University, Leuven, Belgium, May 2007.
2. Canadian novelist and literature scholar Norman Ravvin discusses this connection between Rushdie and Schulz in his as yet unpublished paper "The Afterlife of Bruno Schulz," presented at the conference *Bruno Schulz: New Readings, New Meanings*, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, May 2007. Ravvin has also written his own novel inspired by the stories and drawings of Bruno Schulz, *Café des Westens* (Red Deer College Press, 1991).

# Suggestions for Further Reading

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