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## **The Other Normativity. Bruno Schulz and His Remythologising of the Word**

Bruno Schulz's essay *Mityzacja rzeczywistości*<sup>1</sup> (The Mythologising of Reality), published in 1936, is in general opinion considered to be basically an authorial self-commentary. This interpretation is not obvious, if we assume that a commentary should be clearer than its primary source. This observation will be a point of departure for a reflection on the normativity of a statement about literature formulated not by a theoretician, but by a writer. Another significant remark should be made: there is a difference between a formalised theory that presents the shape of literary practice and a text-correlative of literary texts. It is not merely a matter of changing the accent, as both cases require different criteria of normativity regarding their judgments about literature. *Mythologising* can be a provider of rules, but in a different sense from that of the previous text in relation to the writer's work. It should be read along with the short stories, for example *Wiosna* [Spring] which uses a slightly different discourse or language to develop the same themes. When we read "spring [...] simply took its literal text seriously,"<sup>2</sup> the words of *Spring* send us back to *Mythologising*.

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<sup>1</sup> In Polish edition: Bruno Schulz, "Mityzacja rzeczywistości," in *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, ed. Jerzy Jarzębski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1989), 365–368. Quotation after the English transl. in *Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz, with selected prose*, ed. J. Ficowski, trans. W. Arndt (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1988), 115–117. In main text as *Mythologising*; throughout this work the abbreviation "M" and the page number are given according to the *Letters and Drawings* edition.

<sup>2</sup> Quot. after: *The Complete Fiction of Bruno Schulz*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, afterword by Jerzy Ficowski (New York: Walker, 1989), 143. In Polish edition p. 133.

The text of Schulz<sup>3</sup> seems to have greater ambitions than giving theoretical and philosophical foundations for the strictly literary works of the author (as long as it is indeed possible to differentiate between texts intertwined in the literary output of a single writer). Even if I do not question the need for a parallel reading of *Mythologising* and, for instance, *Spring*, I shall address in this paper only selected aspects of the composition and content of the former text in order to demonstrate that in a certain sense this particular text by Schulz aspires to be normative. For all its mysteriousness and heterogeneity, it offers observations which enter into a dialogue with various concepts (which were important for his contemporaries), and also proves to be a sensitive seismograph, responsive to the tectonic movements of ideas observable at the time. From behind Schulz's literary idiom there emerges a set of philosophical concepts taken from a different order of objectivisation. It emerges only for a while, only to return into the characteristic literary discourse. These tiny islets of sense (marked with different language-related properties) and dispersed axioms are nonetheless important, for they, among other things, indicate the ambition to inform us about the order of the world and the relationship between language and reality. This holistic ambition which Schulz seems to share with Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was just about to edit his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, does not make a contribution comparable to that of the latter. It is nevertheless instructive in the context of what is expected from literature. *Mythologising* is also an excellent example of a statement which has quasi-theoretical and philosophical aspirations; it is conceived *in utero* from a particular idiom and does not dispense with its advantages. In other words, while analysing the text, one can reconstruct the at times inconsistent views of the writer, but can also observe the two contradictory tendencies which the text attempts to reconcile – the literary quality of form and the philosophical validity of judgments. Indeed, does *Mythologising* aim to be treated as a philosophical treatise? Or does it merely imitate a gesture of judgment? The subsequent parts of this article will be focused on these concerns; I shall propose a reinterpretation of selected passages from this essay-treatise and refer to some contexts which are important for reading the text.

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<sup>3</sup> See Jerzy Ficowski, *Regions of the Great Heresy. The life and work of Bruno Schulz* (London: Newman-Hemisphere, 2000), 89 ff; Jerzy Jarzębski, *Prowincja centrum: przypisy do Schulza* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 75 ff; Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Modalności modernizmu. Studia, analizy, interpretacje* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2012), 447 ff; Czesław Z. Prokopczyk, "The Mythical and the Ordinary in Bruno Schulz," in *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations*, ed. Czesław Z. Prokopczyk (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 175–209.

### 1. *The First Five Sentences*

Every general theory of reality is metaphysics. This is the assumption behind Bruno Schulz's essay. Let us spell it out at once, though: it is a treatise, not an essay. Schulz condenses his beliefs (which, it seems safe to say, he has held for many years) into the form of a treatise; referencing reality as early as in his heading. Thus he indicates, even in the title, that he would be taking a metaphysical issue as the subject of his considerations.<sup>4</sup> Scholars concur that, irrespective of genre qualification, this statement can be regarded as Schulz's most salient explication of his own poetics. As we can see, poetics borders directly on metaphysics here: in Schulz's view, literature can only be accessed through metaphysics. However, contrary to other Schulzian speculations which are regarded as self-commentary, above all, contrary to his other treatise, openly acknowledged as such, *Traktat o manekinach* [Treatise on Tailors' Dummies], the treatise in hand is one of these texts by Schulz, few and far between in his *oeuvre*, which, up until the concluding full stop, are not brushed with so much as a touch of irony.<sup>5</sup>

*Mythologising* is a highly peculiar text. Polish literature knows no other work of such profundity (in the mystical sense of the term). Its extreme laconism, its categorical tone, put readers in mind of Plotinus' *Enneads* or Lucretius' *The Nature of Things*. And yet, the mental duct, the *Ideengang* of Schulz's treatise, gives these same readers the impression of being conducted in the manner of Euclid or Spinoza: by means of the axiomatic method. The treatise is comprised of nothing but assumptions arranged in order of significance; of axioms to which appropriate numbers could easily be assigned. This makes the argument of *Mythologising* akin to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, another work that is crystal clear within the individual words and sentences that comprise it, and yet erects a structure which seems to reach into the fourth dimension of one's capacity for understanding.

However, there can be little doubt that axioms in *Mythologising* only seemingly follow the obvious pattern of entailment. In fact, subsequent declarative sentences, or phases of the argument, are separated by gaps in logical consequence. In the key opening paragraph of Schulz's treatise, not one of the consequential sentences is a direct development of the argument of the preceding sentence. It is not without surprise that one discerns

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<sup>4</sup> See Adam Zagajewski, "Drohobycz i świat," in *Bruno Schulz. In memoriam 1892–1992*, ed. Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak (Lublin: Fis, 1992), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Włodzimierz Bolecki's and Piotr Miliati's entires on irony in *Słownik schulzowski*, ed. W. Bolecki, J. Jarzębski and S. Rosiek (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2003), 126–128.

that the author offloads the duty of filling in the gaps between adjacent premises onto the reader. The ambiguity of a text whose structure aspires to being free of ambiguity, is the result not only of elementary concepts being connoted in a peculiar manner, but also of the urge to bind Schulz's thought into a whole, unaided. As one does so, the omitted mediate modes are at times no less significant than the main premises. Hence the peculiar atmosphere of mystery surrounding *Mythologising* – a direct result of the piece's form, part elliptical and part gnomic.<sup>6</sup>

This elliptical nature of the piece is evident already in the opening sentence. The premise: "The essence of reality is Meaning or Sense" (M, 115) is comprised of just four terms and is, undoubtedly, a definition. But at the same time (as a sceptic would say) it is an equation featuring three unknowns. It would seem that the definition applies to the term highlighted by the author with a space: "Sense" – and yet the logical stress falls on the word opposite that first term: "Essence." In other words, this grammatically simple sentence makes us consider the Schulzian concept of reality, and the structure of that concept. Let us accept the working assumption that the author regards reality as phenomena external to the subject (or independent of thought<sup>7</sup>) in their entirety. This might include potential phenomena, and those that are by nature incognisable. If we do so, we are faced with the idea that the "entirety" alluded to earlier is an (at least) two-tier entity. The tier which is given emphasis is referred to here as "the essence." Thus reality can be divided into essential and non-essential; and a distinction between the two is made on the basis of the criterion of meaning. Consequently, the existence of one part of reality is stronger than that of the other(s), with the criterion of "realness" by no means playing a crucial role in this distinction. And, as a result: if the former part is endowed with meaning,<sup>8</sup> the other lies in the fallow fields of meaning-less-ness. If this were to be a definition of "meaning", it must be regarded as highly imperfect. All we learn from it is that the term that was announced as basic, remains vacuous, and qualifies another concept.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Michał Paweł Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiążłość. Schulz, egzystencja, literatura* (Kraków: WUJ, 2012), 23.

<sup>7</sup> See Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiążłość*, 131–132. Markowski discusses the role and functions of Schulz's idea of reality in connection with German philosophical tradition (*Wirklichkeit*).

<sup>8</sup> Anna Szykowska-Piotrowska, "Antyportret w wersji literackiej," *Schulz/Forum* 6 (2015): 41.

<sup>9</sup> Schulz wrote: "Sense is the element that involves mankind in the process of realisation. It is an absolute given that cannot be derived from other givens" (M, 116). As we see, sense precedes reality.

Here we should pause, so that we can pass on to the subsequent sentence, and realise the gap in the argument, the missing link between the two.

“What lacks Sense is, for us, not reality” (M, 115): Schulz offers this sentence as if it were a dogma, constructing, as it were, a reversal of the previous sentence. However, a more significant difference between the two is easily discernible: the phrase “to us” is the key to understanding this sentence. From that point on, it becomes clear that the treatise will deal with human reality alone: the reality that can be conceived of or fathomed by human beings; or whose future cognition humans are capable of anticipating.<sup>10</sup> Only the meaningful (and the meaningful alone) is by definition human. It is precisely that conclusion that establishes a mediate mode between premises one and two. Thus it becomes evident that, according to Schulz, essential reality (or reality made meaningful), and this reality alone, is real to humans. Made meaningful by whom? By a divinity? By its users? Its captives? Or perhaps its creators?

As we regard the second sentence, we need to stress that it includes an exceptionally powerful theme. The unknown scope of events, phenomena or states (which the human subject, here regarded collectively for the sake of simplicity, was unwilling, or unable, to make meaningful) is consigned to the sphere of un-reality. At the same time, this is a non-transitive sentence: thus a whole lot of human speculations, beliefs, convictions, superstitions, and legends – up to the geographies of all manner of anti-worlds and the beyonds – is included in the scope of reality as a human (and thus meaningful) product. That is the result of separating the conception of reality from the concept of realness. In other words: it is the issue of meanings alone that interests Schulz the writer and Schulz the thinker in a reality thus structured. In a world to which he grants the right to exist, everything is meaningful, in one way or another. The Schulzian universe is pansemiotic through and through.<sup>11</sup>

In a word, two sentences were sufficient to enable the author of *Mythologising* to create his own universe and the laws that govern it. If we are to perceive anything at all, it needs to be meaningful to us. And it is this sentence, in its capacity as a mediate mode, that steers us towards the third premise: “Every fragment of reality lives thanks to its playing a part in some universal meaning” (M, 115).

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<sup>10</sup> See Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość*, 147.

<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence that the fifth sentence of *Mythologising* is: “The nameless does not exist for us” (M, 115).

We expect the subsequent sentence to predicate on the principle behind the spreading of that participation – but in vain. More on that in a moment.

For the time being, let us observe that, in keeping with his tactics of moving both forward and backward along his line of argument, Schulz specifies that this repudiated and erased scope of the universal universe (mentioned above) lived to see this fate because it cannot but be regarded as being devoid of life. Schulz is interested in the living reality alone; and that element of life is contained within the secret of a relationship; not, however, the mutual relationship between all conceivable elements; but a relationship that is passed on as an external sanction. It is this causative factor that grants a gift that can be called supernatural without any reservations: the gift of bestowing sense. Meaning is concealed neither in things alone nor in the structure which these things come to form; meaning was established, and is revealed, by the radiance of the absolute, akin to the regard of God in the philosophical systems of George Berkeley or Descartes. This state of affairs, stated in the opening sentences of *Mythologising*, is exceptional for its timeline and temporal dimension; and for originating at a certain point in time. This horizon is outlined by the following, fourth sentence of the text: “The old cosmogonies expressed this by the statement: ‘In the beginning, was the Word’.” (M, 115). Naturally, what is meant here is not so much “the old cosmogonies” as one, Hebrew cosmogony, on which the logocentrism of Western culture is founded. According to the Hebrew tradition, not only did the Word create reality, but it also, till this day, protects the real from the pressure of pre-verbal chaos.

The theological aspect aside, The Logos demarcates the very boundary between a world within which communication and understanding are possible; and an unuttered world, of which it can only be said that understanding is irrelevant to it. Thus the fifth sentence of *Mythologising*: “The nameless does not exist for us” (M, 115) should in fact be uttered prior to the “cosmogonic” fourth, preceded with the conclusion which offers a continuation of the third sentence. The Inclusion into meaning takes place in the act of naming. What is, in essence, a linguistic activity, is a the source of cohesion, or the order of human reality.

Thus, to recapitulate:

1.1 “The essence of reality is Meaning or Sense.”

1.2 Only the meaningful (and the meaningful alone) is by definition human.

1.2.1 “What lacks Sense is, for us, not reality.”

1.2.2 If we are to perceive anything at all, it needs to be meaningful to us.

2.1. “Every fragment of reality lives thanks to its playing a part in some universal meaning.”

2.1.1 The inclusion into meaning takes place in the act of naming.

2.1.2 “The nameless does not exist for us.”

“The old cosmogonies expressed this in a sentence: ‘In the beginning, was the Word’.”

A sequence of premises which, while steering towards literature, focuses on issues of expressibility, viewing the emanation of a certain, shall we say, energy transcendent over human cognitive powers as the source of meaning; verges on the introduction to a secret doctrine. And, yes, it could have been greeted with a shrug in the mid-1930s, when the idea that the literary art and many other arts had, not so long before, had a fling with a certain concept. Half illumination and half heresy, part cryptosemiotics and part cryptotheology, both a fad and an esoteric creed for the initiated. This idea has left its mark on the entire nineteenth century, from Caspar David Friedrich to Rudolf Steiner and from Novalis to Sigmund Freud.<sup>12</sup> Yes, I do mean Symbolism.<sup>13</sup> *Mythologising* fits into its sphere quite smoothly.

## 2. Further sentences

What follows in *Mythologising* – is well known. The primordial word, the hazy halo around the world’s integral meaning,<sup>14</sup> the queen cell of all potential meanings, whether derivative or reflexive, disintegrated. The utilitarian *diseiecta membris* we know today is but a handful of dust left after the dispersal of the lost holistic mythology. The entailment that is fundamental to the whole treatise makes an appearance at this point. “That is why it [word – E. K.] possesses a tendency to grow back, to regenerate and complete itself in full meaning” (M, 115). The dynamics

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<sup>12</sup> Schulz was a zealous believer in psychoanalytic theory, also in his own creative practice. See Paweł Dybel, “Literatura i prawda, czyli Bruno Schulz i psychoanaliza,” in *Schulz. Między mitem a filozofią*, ed. Joanna Michalik and Przemysław Bursztyka (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2014), 187.

<sup>13</sup> See Dariusz K. Sikorski, *Symboliczny świat Brunona Schulza* (Słupsk: Pomorska Akademia Pedagogiczna, 2004), 149 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Jerzy Jarzębski wrote: “[...] meaning is not some popularly understood ‘logical coherence’, but a mythological notion.” See idem, “Schulz: Universality and the Poetics of the Fragment,” in *Bruno Schulz: New Readings, New Meanings/Nouvelles lectures, nouvelles significations*, ed. Stanisław Latek (Cracow: Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2009), 44.

of the word thus conceals a tendency to reverse the arrow of time. In other words, conscious individuals can use the word as they would use a Wellsian time machine – as evidenced by those instances when the word is liberated from its quotidian functions. Regress is immediately apparent: the word recedes into its meaning-creating, primal being. It is precisely this urge that is being voiced in poetry.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, literature/poetry is essentially a process of involution, aimed at the recollection, the spontaneous reconstruction of extinct mythologies. And, second, that the stuff of culture is demolition matter: “we are building our houses with broken pieces of sculptures and ruined statues of gods as the barbarians did” (M, 115 – 116).<sup>15</sup> All current narratives are strung together from narratives scattered and dragged around the waste heaps of collective memory, from the remnants of the lost sacredness. Bearing that in mind, *Mythologising* treatise should be called, more in line with authorial intention, the Re-Mythologising of Reality.

Along with pansemiotism, this paradoxical regression<sup>16</sup> is another of the distinguishing features of Symbolism. To remain at the issue of the word: Plato’s *Cratylus* emerges from behind Schulz’s argument, with a peculiar theory of an objective language.<sup>17</sup> Such a language would be conceivable (agree the interlocutors in Plato’s dialogue) if one were to assume that the original elements or particles of speech were once directly related to the original elements or particles of the world. In a language recreating this state of affairs, naming would be correct if the elements of the linguistic were to coalesce to form a name; in keeping with the same principle which made the primordial elements of the world coalesce to form things. As we moved on towards rational modernity, this vision took on a magical tinge.

“It was believed for ages” – Paul Valéry reminds us apropos of Mallarmé – “that certain combinations of words had more Power than apparent meaning; that they were better understood by things than by men – by rocks, waters, beasts, gods, buried treasures, and by the laws and forces of life better than by the human reason; that they were clearer to spirits

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<sup>15</sup> This conclusion anticipates the postwar crisis of culture. Enough to change the verb into future simple: “we will build.”

<sup>16</sup> There is also biographical context – Schulz wrote to Andrzej Pleśniewicz: “What you say about our artificially prolonged childhood – our immaturity – takes me little aback. After all, the kind of art I care about is precisely a regression, childhood revisited.” *Letters and Drawings*, 126.

<sup>17</sup> *Plato, Cratylus; Parmenides; Greater Hippias; Lesser Hippias*, with an Engl. transl. by Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7 ff.



than to mind.”<sup>18</sup> These are the attributes of primordial poetry, which, in Symbolism, was tantamount to a magical formula. To reach poetry (as well as magic) one needs to recede further and further into language (and consciousness) – all the way to the state of nature. There is a spell in any poem worthy of its name; the phylogenesis of that poem reiterating the ontogenesis of speech.

The issue goes beyond mental residua, ascribed to the poets by Aleksander Świątochowski, to name but one example.<sup>19</sup> It is a question of doctrine. While in the West, among the artists from Rose+Croix, or the Stefan George circle, the concept of magical symbolism was drowning in oblique statements: in Russia, one version of that idea was explicitly outlined by Andrey Bely. His study *The Magic of Words*, from the *Symbolism* collection, outlines the conceptual boundaries within which Schulz’s reflections developed a generation later. No affiliation is at play here; the shape of thought is determined by a cultural community formed at the turn of the nineteenth century, and consistency in the drawing of conclusions. This context should be outlined in somewhat greater detail.

Language is the most powerful instrument of creation. When I name an object with a word I thereby assert its existence. [The living, spoken word] is the expression of the innermost essence of my nature, and, to the degree that my nature is the same thing as nature in general, the word is an expression of the innermost secrets of nature. [...] If words did not exist, the neither would the world itself. [...] The word creates a new, third world: the world of sound symbols by means of which both the secrets of a world located outside me and those imprisoned in the world inside me come to light... In the word and only in the word do I create for myself what surrounds me from within and from without, for I am the word and only the word.<sup>20</sup>

The thought that, in the mythical *urdistant* past, the cognitive process, music and speech were one, was derived by Bely from Alexander Potebnia, a linguist and ethnographer who preceded the poet by approximately half a century. Potebnia was a (reluctantly revealed) source of inspiration not only for the Symbolists, but also for the Futurists and those behind

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Valéry, “I would sometimes say to Mallarmé,” in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Princeton University Press, 1972), 289.

<sup>19</sup> Aleksander Świątochowski, *Poeta jako człowiek pierwotny* (Kraków: G. Gebethner, 1896), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Andrey Bely, “Magiya slov (The Magic of Words),” in *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*, ed. and trans. S. Cassedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 93–94.

the OPOYAZ<sup>21</sup> group. The fantasy of a word that is fluid, inexpressible, impossible to grasp and inseparable from the thing, proved contagious in the extreme. And it is this fantasy that constitutes a myth in Schulz's understanding of the term: the myth of the need to regain the word.

In 1914 the young Victor Shklovsky published his study-manifesto *The Resurrection of the Word*. These are its opening sentences: "The most ancient poetic creation of man was the creation of words. Now words are dead, and language is like a graveyard, but an image was once alive in the newly-born word."<sup>22</sup> This phrase could well have been penned by Bruno Schulz; for his *Mythologising* could legitimately be titled *The Resurrection of the Word*. And, conversely, Shklovsky's study does, to a certain extent, foreshadow the programme of a peculiar re-Mythologising of reality: the sullyng of the innocence of myth, and the abusing of the idea of regression in its diabolical, political-propagandist dimension. But that is a different story altogether.

### 3. Short circuits

There is nothing new in drawing parallels between Schulz and formalists. The Irish scholar Robert Looby argues: "The prose of Bruno Schulz may be interpreted as a parody of Russian formalism."<sup>23</sup> Or, more to the point, his writing "parodies this particular type of literary work of which the Russian formalists were particularly fond." Their intention was exactly the same: they wished to make literature capable of self-regeneration by means of bringing some fresh air into its creational procedures. As Looby notices:

Characters are called into being only to demonstrate formal "tricks." Further on they have no significance and they are not even fully developed. The motivation for these practices is irrelevant, for the world of art is not governed by logic or by an adequate rendering of the real world: they appear on a whim of the writer (the author). If a form becomes unnecessary, it may be discarded and replaced by a new one. The world created by the Father (i.e.: literature as defined in the concepts of the Russian formalists) must nevertheless reveal the mechanisms at work. Any observer has to be aware of the hand of the writer

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<sup>21</sup> See S. Cassedy, *Flight from Eden. The Origins of Modern Literary Criticism and Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), in particular "The Russian Tradition from Potebnia to Shklovsky, with Some Poets in Between," 39–63.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Shklovsky, "The Resurrection of the Word," in *Russian Formalism*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlit (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), 41.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Looby, "Formalizm i parodia w twórczości Brunona Schulza," trans. Zofia Kolbuszewska, in *W ulamkach zwierciadła. Bruno Schulz w 110 rocznicę urodzin i 60 rocznicę śmierci* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2003), 261.

involved in the creative process. The result of this is “junk” and the final words of the first part of the Treatise [*on Tailors’ Dummies* – E. K.] – “we wish to create man a second time, in the shape and semblance of a tailor’s dummy”<sup>24</sup> – presage a nightmare scenario.<sup>25</sup>

In the creative process discussed here – and Looby is convinced that Schulz’s work can be subsumed into this model of acting with words – there lurk potential, if not inevitable, abortive effects. It is arguable whether Schulz proposed a parody or a pastiche of the model described (and actually co-designed) by the formalists. One may, however, take it for certain that he was aware of the fact that “the resurrection of the word” was evidently at stake, even though he did not aspire to provide a theoretical description of his observations. It is worth noticing, as Danuta Ulicka wrote, that the language of the formalists was usually close to the language of literature: soaked with metaphors and highly individualised.<sup>26</sup> Ulicka seems to suggest that the “truth” about the formalists and their texts may be observed “in their genre, their stylistic and compositional features, the diction of the writers, their metaphorical language, and the modality of the texts, often far removed from that expected of scholarly texts.”<sup>27</sup> This is another argument in favour of looking in parallel on *Mythologising* and the formalist treatises.

In his writing, Schulz appears to have nurtured the ambition of confronting two mutually exclusive literary programmes: the archaeology of sense and its transformation, namely (and arguably) symbolism and formalism.<sup>28</sup> It is not merely in parody that these endeavours diverge. The sense-producing activity, which is inextricably linked with integration and capable of making the meanings converge, reveals itself through the practice of disintegration. An analogous play of attitudes, which are observable only in parody, can be sensed in the pathos and black humour of Schulz’s style as well as (with regard to his sources of inspiration

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<sup>24</sup> Quot. after: *The Complete Fiction of Bruno Schulz*, 33. In Polish edition p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Looby, “Formalizm i parodia,” 268.

<sup>26</sup> See: Danuta Ulicka, “Widma formalizmu,” in eadem, *Literaturoznawcze dyskursy możliwe. Studia z dziejów nowoczesnej teorii literatury w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 79ff. Ulicka rightly observes that the term “formalism” is rather inconvenient: despite the vast literature on this topic, there are still many uncertainties concerning the method and status of this circle/school as well as its main conceptions.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> In his discussion of the Schulzean use of the word “sense”, Włodzimierz Bolecki mentioned two parallel phenomena (without noticing the contradiction): the tendency of the word to “supplement itself into a sense” and its capacity for “breaking the rules which are binding in the general linguistic meaning” (Bolecki, “Sens,” in *Słownik schulzowski*, 348).

in terms of the content) in the Dionysian topics appearing together with the Messianic motifs. Włodzimierz Bolecki, in a fairly Schulzean tone, concludes: “Their paradoxical coexistence is exactly the same as the wave and particle theories of light.”<sup>29</sup> Referring to a different subfield of physics, the treatise by Schulz contains the following concise statement: “in the course of time the word becomes static and rigid, stops being the conductor of new meanings” (M, 116).

*Mythologising* offers suggestions as to how this resistance (another “electrical” metaphor) should be understood. For it is at this particular instance that we may find an answer to the question of why Schulz consistently referred to the medium of the self-contained dynamics of sense by calling it “the word.” It does not matter whether this is descriptive or prescriptive; either way is relevant in the context of this treatise. The word is merely a pure potentiality of sense. In Schulz’s writing, “the life of the word,” the organism of the word, and “the development” and “liberation” of the word signify the potential for and the subsequent stages of the regeneration of primaeval myths. It is only in the linguistic act, capable of initiating this potential, invests the language with the status of speech, a speech which comes to fruition as a “man’s metaphysical organ” (M, 116). Thus, speech establishes a language within a language – and this was indeed a goal for both symbolism and for the ‘literariness’ sought by the formalists. The intentions of Schulz, however, by drawing (apparently) on the etymological tale of symbolism, go through a series of transformations and evolve into a formalistic conceptualism. One of the consequences of symbolism is the transformation of narrative into a musical movement of meanings, which is subject to “its own calm gravitational rhythm.”<sup>30</sup> But the Schulzean word is a seedling of “fabulism”, a notion he was particularly fond of, which involved “inventing fables” and “creating tales.” Schulz was fully aware of the nature of this endeavour which went simultaneously in two opposite directions and included these tales in the story *Dummies*, a preliminary draft for the *Treatise*, as can be seen particularly in the features of the main character, the father-heresiarch:

Is worth noting how, in contact with this strange man, all things reverted, as it were, to the roots of their existence, rebuilt their outward appearance anew

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<sup>29</sup> Włodzimierz Bolecki, “‘Principium individuationis’. Motywy nietscheańskie w twórczości Brunona Schulza,” in *W ulamkach zwierciadła*, 337.

<sup>30</sup> From a letter to A. Pleśniewicz, in B. Schulz, *Księga listów*, ed. J. Ficowski, supplemented by S. Danecki; *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 5 (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2016), 120. (Drohobycz, March 4, 1936).

from their methaphysical 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.<sup>31</sup>

The writer distinguishes himself from his character by the sequence of procedures: he divorces things from the “primary idea,” “methaphysical core,” only to plunge them into the “Regions of the Great Heresy,” so that they can return “to the roots of their existence.” This reversal is fundamental for the understanding of Schulz’s writing and his quasi-theoretical works.

The act of Schulzean speech always takes into account the confrontation between the sense and the matter of life: “The human spirit is indefatigable in supplying glosses to life by means of myths, in ‘making sense’ of reality” (M, 116). The author of the *Mythologising* was aware of the fact that linguistic activity consists in the everlasting conflict between the act of expressing and the expressed, in the realm of difference which opens up again and again. The word, which is the vehicle of the Schulzean sense, collides with its usage. The quoted passage brings an additional value to this particular knowledge about language and its relations with what is named: it says that our human speech, as a reservoir of myths, is not subject to the irrational. What is irrational is beyond the human. Had it not been for our meticulous glossing, the mute obviousness (something that can be seen) would never have become a reality endowed with sense.

*Mythologising* presents the birth of a story from the spirit of the word. When considered in the perspective of formal ambitions, the effect should lead to some new and previously unknown meanings owing to a renovation of the linguistic usage. But in Schulz’s works the act of speech reveals the “striving of the word toward its matrix” (M, 115), the return of the word into its primaeval integral character. In a sense, one can find here an attempt at returning to the time before the confusion of languages, a reversal beyond the Tower of Babel.

The semantic occurrence, which is fundamental for speech, is a precondition for understanding everything which, in Schulz’s view, has to do with using language (and consequently for all sorts of understanding). The Schulzean word resembles a metaphor, but its range is far broader in his discussion. In addition to being a momentary “short-circuit of sense” (as above), it is also a mysterious story, which contains deep in its core its individual, inner linguistic nexus. Precisely this is implied in the quest for the birth of meaning in Schulz’s works pursued by Krzysztof Stala (with references to Merleau-Ponty):

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<sup>31</sup> Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*, 29–30.

If we, however, consider deformation of the world in metaphor as liberating the world from the fixed forms of language, and “adjusting” it into new forms that emerge out of metaphorical tensions – then the deformation ceases to be a “geometrical” operation; it turns to be a source of sense. Thus, metaphor defamiliarises reality while deforming it and, paradoxically, allows new meanings to appear in the world.<sup>32</sup>

This is indeed to the point: the antonym of the Schulzean reality is obviousness (or – metaphorically speaking – clarity).

In his work, the writer (Schulz refers to him as “the poet”<sup>33</sup>) reaches out for entirely new means, almost illegal ones, in order to regain timelessness. The Mythologising of reality will never stop, as it leads into the infinity of disillusion, beyond which there appears the universal sense. A memorable sentence from the Schulzean story titled *Księga* [The Book] reads: “The exegetes of The Book maintain that all books aim at being Authentic. [...] This means that as the number of books decreases, the Authentic must increase.”<sup>34</sup> The indirect metaphysical conclusion of *Mythologising* seems to be similar: as the dynamics of the word has it, reality grows with the decrease in obviousness.

#### 4. Wittgenstein

Let us begin with a well-founded hypothesis: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz<sup>35</sup> might have recommended Schulz a book which the latter could not ignore. The book in question was the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein, obviously in the original (the Anglo-German version published in 1922). The *Tractatus* originated from Wittgenstein’s notes taken in the trenches of the First World War; in August 1918, when Wittgenstein was on leave and stayed with his uncle near Salzburg, he rewrote the notes which provided the basis for the text of the *Tractatus*. As Maciej Soin wrote: “a major part of all published texts attributed to the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is in fact a digest from the notes on the margins of a great book which has never been written.”<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein’s book is not Schulz’s, for Schulz’s book is backed

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<sup>32</sup> Krzysztof Stala, *On the Margins of Reality. The paradoxes of Representation in Bruno Schulz’s Fiction* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 81.

<sup>33</sup> See also Wiesław Juszcak, *Poeta i mit* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2014), 8 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Stanisław I. Witkiewicz, *Zagadnienie psychofizyczne* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1998), 168–237. See also Maciej Soin, *Filozofia Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza* (Wrocław: FNP, 1995), 111 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Maciej Soin, *Gramatyka i metafizyka. Problem Wittgensteina* (Wrocław: FNP, 2001), 8.

by myth. Wittgenstein's book, however, is also a hypothetical universe – a universe of everything that can be said with sense, as far as the language can reach. It is not necessary to discuss in this paper the early reception of the mysterious book by the German philosopher, especially from the time before it gained appreciation from Moritz Schlick and the Vienna Circle. The tradition of thought which was formative for Wittgenstein was clearly different from that of Schulz; their ambitions in the professional sense go in different directions. But is this true for all of their aspirations? Both the *Tractatus* and the *Mythologising* share the ambition of delivering judgments which are authoritative enough to be proffered for belief. Certainly, Wittgenstein's sentences can be checked with logical calculus – no one would like to do the same with the text by Schulz. But if we cast an unprejudiced glance on the text of *Mythologising*, we shall see the structure of sentences which tantalisingly resembles the opening pages of one of the most important philosophical works of the twentieth century, a work which was indeed revelatory, certainly at the time when Schulz was writing his *Mythologising*. Both texts begin with a series of axioms; both authors use them as building blocks, but between them one may sense, metaphorically speaking, a certain space of glossing over.<sup>37</sup>

To quote from the *Tractatus*:

1 The world is everything that is the case.

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.

1.12 For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case.<sup>38</sup>

The first sentence in German reads: “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist.” If “the case” or “der Fall” could be replaced with “meaning”, then the first sentence of the *Tractatus* would read: “The world is everything that is the meaning.” Was it possible for Schulz to engage in this exercise of imagination? It surely was. Judging by the notes of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz about contemporary philosophical works, there was an extremely keen interest in discussing the views proffered in the texts of philosophers. The polemical-ecstatic temperament of Witkiewicz was

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<sup>37</sup> One can associate the gnomic, hermetic, and persuasive character with the poetics of the treatise, but it has to be noted that the parallel Schulz-Wittgenstein cannot be reduced to just that.

<sup>38</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922), 25.

clearly different from the restrained reflection of Schulz, nevertheless one may conclude that the lively reaction to these works was a communal phenomenon. What was the Wittgensteinian “case” for Schulz? A key-word of unspecified scope, but powerful in its binding force? In suggesting this, I propose to use an analogy to the Schulzean “meaning”, which is repeated again and again in *Mythologising* as a type of mantra – but at the same time it is left unexplained. In this sense, the case contains a similar magic potential as the meaning. Schulz could have read the opening theses as an introduction to a secret doctrine, even though he must have been fully aware of the formal character of Wittgenstein’s text. What are the consequences of this? Stylistically, it leads to a play with the poetics of the treatise. In terms of interpretation, it proposes an attempt at mobilising the language so that it could tell something about itself and the reality that could be proffered for belief. Certainly, the expectations go in different directions: as opposed to Wittgenstein, who discusses the representation of reality in language, Schulz will discuss reality as a shadow of the Word. This observation, however, does not contradict the view that the opening sentences of *Mythologising* polemicise with the de-mythicising analytical approach and, concurrently, attempt to imitate the categorical character of its assertions. For the *Mythologising* is a text which is based on the underlying ambition of communicating the poetic state of things. And indeed, this state of things aspires to be in force beyond the sphere of literariness. It aims to be an alternative proposition for explaining reality.

### 5. Summary

*Mythologising* concludes what Wittgenstein had already concluded: “The limits of my language means the limits of my world,” but in another language. According to Schulz it is the language that allows for the encounter of philosophy<sup>39</sup> and philology. *The Mythisation of Reality* should be problematised as a meeting point of theoretical reflection and writing practice precisely because of the specificity of modernism, not in separation from it. The juxtaposition of literary languages, theories, philosophies etc. in this particular case may lead to conclusions about some normative dimension of literature itself as well as quasi-theoretical writing practice of modernist authors. At the same time, the creator of literature undertakes a theoretical reflection on it, always writes it in units because it comprises a part of his own creative path.

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<sup>39</sup> “Philosophy is actually philology, the deep, creative exploration of the word” (M, 117).



*Mythologising* is not a treatise about the impossibility of describing reality, seeing that reality is a simulacrum. While in language criticism Schulz could anticipate deconstruction,<sup>40</sup> he is thinking about language in a modernist way. *Mythologising* is remythologising – enchanting again what was once disenchanting. It is possible, because this quasi-theoretical text was written from the inside of the literature, as history is written from the inside of language.

### *Abstract*

Despite its various readings, *The Mythologising of Reality* by Schulz – an essay, a treatise, and, in a way, a self-reflexive commentary of the author – still remains a mystery. And this is due not only to the fact that it may be interpreted in keeping with or against the symbolist tradition – this observation is valid for all conceptions which may be applied to this text. Its ambiguity is related to an attempt at reconciling (and co-creating) the requirements of literary evolution with reaching out (in literature and through literature) for the redeemed time. A close reading of this treatise reveals its notable feature: some of its sentences imitate the concise and categorical character of analytical sentences. As a result, two modes of reading present themselves: not only does *Mythologising* provide some rules to the Schulzean world, but it also leans out from it towards contemporary literature and philosophy.

*Key words:* Bruno Schulz; formalism; language meaning; mythologizing; normativity

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<sup>40</sup> See Józef Olejniczak, “Na boku fikcji – Bruno Schulz,” in *Na boku. Pisarze teoretykami literatury?... (szkice)*, (Katowice: Para, 2007), 171.

